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ABSTRACT

The Boys Town Education Model for classroom management is described in 15 chapters of this book. Emphasizing social skills instruction, each chapter elaborates a tool or technique needed to foster a positive, supportive, and structured classroom environment. Chapter 1, "The Well-Managed Classroom," discusses the four components of the model which help students learn productive ways of managing their own behavior and interacting with others. Chapter 2, "Student Rights," describes the guidelines and processes for protecting and assuring the free exercise of the children's rights and privileges. Chapter 3, "Building and Maintaining Relationships," stresses the importance of building and maintaining positive student-teacher relationships. The fourth chapter, "Problem-solving," explores the teaching of problem-solving skills. Chapter 5, "Principles of Behavior," discusses principles of behavior which form the foundation of the model. Chapter 6, "Teaching the Curriculum Skills," examines the 16 social skills which constitute the curriculum. The seventh chapter, "Observing and Describing Behavior," focuses on the ability of teachers to observe and describe behavior. Chapter 8, "Rationales," explains the importance of supplying rationales to students for the consequences of their behavior. Chapter 9, "Effective Praise," describes how to recognize and reward appropriate behavior. Chapter 10, "Preventive Teaching," highlights how to prevent problems before they occur. Chapter 11, "The Teaching Interaction," discusses how inappropriate social behaviors can be addressed and prosocial alternatives taught. Chapter 12, "Ongoing Behavior," explores the phenomenon of ongoing behavior or problem behavior that interferes with the student's ability to learn. Chapter 13, "Behavior Contracting," describes the technique of making contracts with students to promote behavior change. Chapter 14, "Overview of Administrative Intervention," provides an overview of administrative intervention. The last chapter, "Working with Parents," emphasizes the need to work with parents in shared educational decision-making. Contains over 90 references. (BAC)

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THE BOYS TOWN EDUCATION METHODS THAT HAVE TRANSFORMED
PRESCHOOL THROUGH HIGH SCHOOL CLASSROOMS ACROSS THE COUNTRY

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The Well-Managed Classroom

Promoting Student Success Through Social Skill Instruction

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The well-managed classroom

Promoting student success through social skill instruction

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Boys Town education training workshops

Over the past 25 years, educators have consistently identified discipline as one of the biggest problems in American schools. When educators must focus on controlling student behavior rather than teaching, learning suffers.

To solve this problem, many schools and school districts have turned to the Boys Town Education Model, a training program that enables educators to help students manage their own behavior by learning social skills.

To accomplish this goal, the Model:

—provides a step-by-step process for teaching social skills to students.

—shows educators how to make the teaching of social skills part of the regular school curriculum.

—gives educators a systematic way to address appropriate and inappropriate behavior.

—defines when and how teachers should refer students to the office.

Boys Town offers three Education Training workshops to teach these methods.

Pre-Service Workshops — Three workshops provides educators with the specialized technology to begin implementing the Model: Social Skills in the Schools (three days); Comprehensive Classroom Management for Special-Needs students (five days); and Administrative Intervention (three days).

These workshops are conducted monthly on the Boys Town Home Campus and by contract on-site throughout the country.

Consultation Services — Schools that want more than just workshop training may also contract for these services: classroom observation, treatment planning, and consultation documentation.

Training of Trainers — This training process teaches educators how to implement and supervise the Boys Town Education Model in their own schools.

Nearly 5,000 individuals from 375 schools, districts, and agencies have received training in the Boys Town Education Model. Research indicates that use of the Model helps increase the amount of time students spend on-task, and decreases the number of office referrals. Teachers spend less time dealing with disruptive behavior, and students report that they get along better with their parents, teachers; and other students.

Educators who have implemented the Boys Town Education Model in their schools report overwhelmingly positive results. Chuck Huber, principal of a Casper, Wyoming, elementary school, said every teacher in the school has come to him with "a Shazam story — when they use the intervention steps and it just works, it clicks."

Paula Conley, an associate principal at Elsik North High School in Alief, Texas, said the program has been effective because "expectations are consistent. The children know what their behavior expectations are and they are meeting them. It's a teaching program..."

And Laurie Morrison, a kindergarten teacher in North Platte, Nebraska, said "This is not a model for school, it's a model for life."

Boys Town wants to share its teaching methods with you and your school. For more information about workshops, call the Boys Town Education Training program at (402) 498-1596.

Table of contents

CHAPTER ONE
The Well-Managed Classroom 1

CHAPTER TWO
Student rights 9

CHAPTER THREE
Building and maintaining relationships 17

CHAPTER FOUR
Problem-solving 23

CHAPTER FIVE
Principles of behavior 33

CHAPTER SIX
Teaching the curriculum skills 49

CHAPTER SEVEN
Observing and describing behavior 57

CHAPTER EIGHT
Rationales 63

CHAPTER NINE
Effective praise 71

CHAPTER TEN
Preventive teaching 77

CHAPTER ELEVEN
The teaching interaction 87

CHAPTER TWELVE
Ongoing behavior 97

CHAPTER THIRTEEN
Behavior contracting 113

CHAPTER FOURTEEN
Overview of administrative intervention 121

CHAPTER FIFTEEN
Working with parents 131

APPENDIX
Social skills for special education/young students 145

REFERENCES 147

INDEX 155

CHAPTER ONE

The well-managed classroom

The concept of classroom management is broader than the notion of student discipline. It includes all the things teachers must do to foster student involvement and cooperation in classroom activities and to establish a productive work environment.

Sanford, Emmer, and Clements, "Improving Classroom Management," **Educational Leadership**, April 1983.

In order for children to gain control of their lives and realize a sense of academic and personal fulfillment, they must first learn how to accept responsibility for their behavior, how to respect the rights of others, how to solve problems, and how to make choices and decisions that can benefit them or that are in the best interest of others. Teachers who maintain a well-managed classroom empower their students to attain these goals.

Until very recently, discussions about classroom management have placed too much emphasis on controlling unproductive student behavior and not enough on creating a learning environment that encourages productive student behavior. Discipline should not be limited to something you do after a student has done something wrong. But rather, discipline should restructure your relationship with your students to facilitate effective classroom management and, ultimately, to imbue them with a positive self-image and a sense of responsibility.

Frequently, the strategies teachers employ in an attempt to effectively manage their classrooms and deter problems from occurring in fact often contribute to, or even exacerbate the problem. The most frustrating problems and unpleasant experiences associated with teaching are, often times, the basic classroom management issues teachers face each and every day.

This book supplies a specific, detailed program to help you motivate and encourage your students to develop and maintain responsible behaviors essential to their success — both inside and outside the classroom.

Whether you are an experienced or a beginning teacher, this manual offers a comprehensive social skills curriculum and systematic, sequential teaching techniques along with practical classroom management strategies.

Thorough reviews of classroom management done by some of the most prominent researchers in the field (Brophy, 1983; Doyle, 1986; Charles, 1989; Duke & Meckel, 1984; Wolfgang & Glickman, 1986; and Jones & Jones, 1990) suggest that five major factors can be correlated with effective classroom management:

1. **A sound theoretical foundation and understanding of classroom management and the needs of students.**
2. **Strong positive teacher-student and peer relationships.**
3. **Instructional methods that motivate students.**
4. **Organizational and group management techniques that maximize students "on-task" behavior.**
5. **Problem-solving and behavior management techniques that empower students to assume responsibility for managing their own behavior.**

If students are motivated to learn, if they feel good about the classroom environment and the relationship they have with you, if they can manage themselves and accept responsibility for their behavior, and if they feel empowered to improve, then and only then can you effectively teach and your students truly learn.

Effective classroom managers create classroom environments that are positive, supportive, and at the same time, well-structured. Effective classroom managers maintain structure in their classrooms through the effective use of management practices that help students acquire the necessary skills to think and problem-solve, accept responsibility with regard to rules, limits, and the needs of others, and develop a positive self-image.

For more than 75 years, Boys Town's mission has been to improve the way children are treated, regardless of their race, creed, or handicapping conditions. We are proud to expand this mission to include the goal of making the nation's schools a better place for all students.

> ***"There are no bad boys. There are only bad environments, bad examples, bad thinking."***
>
> Father Edward J. Flanagan,
> Founder of Boys Town, 1917

When Father Flanagan said these words, sometimes all it took to help a homeless or wayward youth were love, compassion, and a place the child could call home. But as youth problems became more difficult and more complex, Boys Town realized the

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need to combine compassion with the competence that comes from dedicated professionals working in a healthy learning environment.

Boys Town's current programs have their origins in the efforts of professionals who designed, developed, and implemented the Teaching-Family Model (Phillips, 1968; Phillips, Phillips, Fixsen, & Wolf, 1974). From those origins, Boys Town has spent more than 15 years developing its own Family Home Program (Coughlin, Maloney, Baron, Dahir, Daly, Daly, Fixsen, Phillips, & Thomas, 1983; Baron, Cunningham, Palma, & Phillips, 1984; Peter, 1986). During those years, Boys Town has devoted time, energy, resources, and personnel to disseminating its technology to programs serving troubled children and youth nationwide.

The Boys Town Education Model is a good example of this technology transfer — taking the basic techniques of its family-based Model and transferring them to a school setting as a powerful and innovative approach to positive and effective interventions for troubled students. A success-oriented program of personalized social skills instruction is the hallmark of the Boys Town Education Model. Initiated in 1977 at a residential school in Montana, the key concepts were brought to Boys Town in 1979 and further developed. *The Well-Managed Classroom* describes these concepts in detail.

By implementing the Education Model in its classrooms, Boys Town has demonstrated that schools can significantly reduce discipline problems while directly and humanely teaching vital life skills in a positive school climate. Work by professionals at Boys Town and elsewhere (Larson, 1989; Czerwionka, 1987) has shown that difficult-to-teach, behaviorally disordered adolescents can be effectively taught a variety of social skills. Two years after initiating its campus school program, Boys Town became actively involved in the nationwide dissemination of the Model. Today, public and private schools across the country implement the Boys Town Education Model with great success.

Part of the appeal of the Boys Town Education Model is that it is one of the few programs that can be integrated into the entire school day and across the curriculum. This helps to overcome some of the generalization problems associated with programs that occur only in one classroom or outside the school. Research evidence suggests that nonschool programs have little effect on school behavior (Jones & Offord, 1989).

Schools were made for children and learning. This simple premise underlies what we believe should be true about any good school program. It is our contention, therefore, that all students must experience success in school, be it academic, vocational, athletic, or artistic success. Whether the individual becomes a good math student or a poor math student, a good athlete or a poor athlete, is, in all probability, less dependent upon the student's academic and physical characteristics than upon the student's social/emotional skills (Cartledge & Milburn, 1978; Stephens, 1978; Hope & Cobb, 1973; Borich, 1971).

Unfortunately, many youth have not acquired the social behaviors necessary to effectively and appropriately interact with peers and adults in school settings. As a result, they do not achieve academic success.

These students are the same youth who have lacked other success experiences as well and have been identified by school personnel as discipline problems, being at risk, behaviorally impaired, or emotionally disturbed. Their problems are compounded by the fact that the very social behaviors they lack are the same ones employers have identified as vital to success in the world of work (Gresham, 1981). There is hope. Researchers have found social skills training to be effective in developing job-related skills in learning-disabled and behavior-disordered adolescents (Montague, 1988).

The last decade has seen rapid growth in the number of youngsters identified as special-needs students and in the programs developed to serve them. Clearly, one of the program needs is social skills instruction. Hansen, Lawrence, and Cristoff (1980) found conduct-disordered youth to have poorer social skills than "normal" youth. Less knowledge of social skills was found highly associated with a wide range of behavioral problems (Venziano & Venziano, 1988).

Present methods of teaching socialization to school-age children rely primarily on nonstructured or informal social experiences encountered in schools, at home, and in the community (Clark, 1980). The school is the only professionally staffed agency that sees virtually all children, making it an ideal avenue for teaching social skills. For approximately 180 days each year, the nation's schools provide youth from age 6 to 18 with a sizable portion of their nonstructured informal social experiences. It seems reasonable then to assume that our schools could provide a setting that emphasizes social behavior as a structured part of the school curriculum, thereby beginning a process of assisting students in becoming more socially adept.

Developing a systematic means to routinely teach socialization to school-age children poses quite a challenge. However, shifting the emphasis of instruction from a solely academic curriculum to a combination of academic and social behaviors does not entail lengthening the school day, eliminating required course work, or extending graduation requirements. Rather, it requires the dedication of school personnel in addressing social behavior as an ongoing part of the school curriculum in all classrooms, corridors, playgrounds, and office areas each and every day. Such dedication and vigilance in addressing social behavior obviously requires that teachers and administrators be provided with sound theoretical principles and practical approaches to guide their teaching efforts. Education should not and cannot be for the select few who come from environments that help them become not only academically inclined, but also socially acceptable to peers and adults. Schools have group life, a vast range of possible activities, many caring adults, and a mandate to use these resources for the welfare of all children, including the troubled or troublesome child. Boys Town's goal has been, and continues to be, to develop an effective school program that promotes success through the teaching of social skills and serves as a model for others to use, benefiting youth nationwide. This program is the Boys Town Education Model.

Components of the Boys Town Education Model

The Boys Town Education Model is firmly rooted in principles of applied behavior analysis and social learning theory. Its underlying premise is that behavior is learned through feedback on behavior and its environmental consequences (Bandura, 1969). The Model's focus is on teaching because troubled youth have social skills deficiencies and have not yet learned or been effectively instructed how to interact in a socially appropriate way with others (Wolf, Phillips, & Fixsen, 1972; Sarason, 1968; Shah, 1966, 1968).

This behavioral model involves the identification of desirable prosocial behavioral expectations, the effective use of instructional strategies to teach those expectations, the application of an incentive system, and the effective implementation of reinforcement principles. The following elements have been developed and refined for use within a school context:

1. **Social Skills Curriculum**
2. **Teaching Interactions**
3. **Motivation Systems**
4. **Administrative Intervention**

The combined use of these program components provides educators with the technology to help all students — from those in the regular classroom to those in the most restrictive special education environment — build social skills to maximize their personal effectiveness. A brief review of each of these four program components follows.

Social Skills Curriculum

The Social Skills Curriculum provides the foundation for a structured educational approach to the socialization of school-age children. The curriculum offers a manageable yet well-defined set of 16 social behaviors encompassing Adult Relations, Peer Relations, School Rules, and Classroom Behaviors. This set of skills assists teachers to go beyond merely labeling problem behaviors (e.g. compulsive talker, lazy, restless, etc.), which often hinders identifying specific alternative behaviors that should be promoted, reinforced, strengthened, or taught.

Boys Town Schools
Social Skills Curriculum

1. Following instructions.
2. Accepting criticism or a consequence.
3. Accepting "No" for an answer.
4. Greeting others.
5. Getting the teacher's attention.
6. Making a request.
7. Disagreeing appropriately.
8. Giving criticism.
9. Resisting peer pressure.
10. Making an apology.
11. Engaging in a conversation.

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12. Giving compliments.
13. Accepting compliments.
14. Volunteering.
15. Reporting other youths' behavior.
16. Introducing yourself.

Teaching Interactions

While the social skills identify what to teach, the Teaching Interaction® guides **how** to teach, using specialized approaches similar to the direct instructional techniques advocated by Stephens (1978) and the structured role-play activities of Goldstein, Sprafkin, Gershaw, and Klein (1980). The greatest opportunity for skill generalization comes about through the instruction of skills in naturalistic settings, including classrooms, hallways, and offices (Gresham, 1982). Teaching Interactions promote this generalization.

Teaching Interactions differ from other social skill approaches by using a brief interactive instructional sequence with the student when the behavior occurs. This technique uniquely combines efforts to manage student behavior with the care and concern of teaching an alternative appropriate social behavior. Capitalizing on the teachable moment, when the learner is active and the learning is relevant, the Teaching Interaction allows the teacher to deal with behavior problems in an efficient, effective, and humane fashion (Downs, Kutsick, & Black, 1985; Phillips, Phillips, Fixsen, & Wolf, 1974).

Most educators find a smooth flow within the Teaching Interaction sequence. It can be used with any number of social behavior problems and can be applied in regular or special education settings. Teaching Interactions are concrete and provide positive instruction. Anyone who works with students (e.g., counselors, teachers, psychologists, administrators) can use the Teaching Interaction technique. Educators need only view the inappropriate behaviors of students as vital learning/teaching opportunities, not as personal insults or challenges of authority.

Motivation Systems

While the Boys Town Education Model uses Teaching Interactions to establish new behaviors, it is also essential for many troubled youth that this process includes the giving of positive consequences when the student performs desired behaviors so that newly acquired behavior can be strengthened. This systematic application of immediate consequences is part of what is known as the Motivation Systems. (Note: The Motivation Systems are used in Special Education or self-contained classrooms and may or may not be utilized within your school environment.)

Many students are motivated to learn without extrinsic rewards. For these youth, the combined use of clear behavioral expectations as defined by the Social Skills Curriculum and the instruction offered through a Teaching Interaction serve to develop highly successful student behavior. However, students with significant social skills deficits —students identified as behaviorally disordered, at risk, or emotionally disturbed — often lack motivation to learn and alter behavior. These students must be given help early on through external measures that hopefully will later lead to the development of an internal desire to learn (O'Leary & Drabman, 1971). The Motivation Systems provide a comprehensive framework for consistently applying principles of learning that will maximize behavior change for these students (Downs, Bastien, Brown, & Wells, 1987).

At the root of the Motivation Systems is a token economy. In the context of a Teaching Interaction, student behavior is confronted and results in consequences in the form of points. The immediacy of the consequences (points) helps motivate behavior change. Students accumulate points to gain access to reinforcers, including tangible items, privileges, and activities.

The Boys Town Motivation Systems are incorporated as a comprehensive framework that helps students with moderate to severe behavioral deficits add social skills to their repertoire of behaviors. The three-level token economy reflects stages of skill acquisition and provides the appropriate degree of structure plus support necessary at each developmental level. This multilevel approach meets each student's individual needs while providing a gradual transition from artificial consequences to more naturally occurring forms of feedback and internal controls.

Administrative Intervention

Historically, schools often have viewed their role in discipline as one of providing punishment for rule-breaking behavior. This punishment frequently has included suspensions, expulsions, shortened school days, administrative transfers, and ignored truancies (Grosenick & Huntze, 1984). These forms of punishment have questionable effectiveness, are potentially harmful, often lead to a punitive school climate, and may, in some cases, violate statutes protecting the rights of handicapped youth.

Administrative Intervention allows school administrators to function as effective change agents in response to more serious or continuing school discipline problems. It extends the teaching focus found in the other components of the Boys Town Education Model to include working with students who are "out of control," and have been removed from the classroom and sent to the office. This approach, which includes Teaching Interactions and behavioral rehearsal (practice) adapted from the Boys Town Family Home Program, assumes that discipline is a process of training for correction or teaching alternative ways of responding to stressful classroom or school situations.

Deficits in social behavior (e.g. following instructions, accepting criticism, accepting "No" for an answer, resisting peer pressure) often make it difficult for students to remain in the classroom and, eventually, even in the school program (Schumaker, Hazel, Sherman, & Sheldon, 1982). The Boys Town Social Skills Curriculum (Brown, Black, & Downs, 1984) and a set of procedures designed to help administrators remain calm provide the framework for helping students regain self-control, then teaching them vital social skills and school expectations. An established sequence of consequences for office referrals promotes consistency and predictability while allowing for individualization of responses to rule violations. The goal of this teaching procedure, unlike many discipline policies aimed at the student's exclusion from school, is the youth's successful return to the classroom.

The procedures encompassed within the administrative format are used by administrators or designated persons (e.g. guidance counselors, psychologists, behavior interventionists) across the country. While Administrative Intervention is often used independently of other Model components, it provides crucial support when Motivation Systems are used within a school program.

Summary

The Boys Town Education Model is a comprehensive, systematic method of teaching prosocial skills to youth. Its four components — the Social Skills Curriculum, Teaching Interactions, Motivation Systems, and Administrative Intervention — help students learn productive ways of managing their own behavior and interacting with others. It combines the best of skill-based teaching with care and concern, resulting in improvements in students' behavior, self-esteem, and relationships with others.

While this manual contains some of the reading material used in training educators and provides an overview of the technical components of the Boys Town Education Model (both of which are vitally important to the proper training of education staff), the reader is cautioned not to view this manual as the sum and substance of the Model. These materials alone do not enable someone to fully understand and operate the Boys Town Education Model. For its own teachers and the staff members of schools that contract with Boys Town, Boys Town provides three to five days of intensive skill-based training on the implementation of the Model's components. The training process includes lectures, videotapes, and behavioral rehearsals which have proven effective in the development of trainees' skills. Furthermore, Boys Town has found that training combined with ongoing consultation from individuals with experience in the Boys Town Education Model and systematic evaluation input form the foundation for a successful education program and effective classroom management.

CHAPTER TWO

Student rights

Historically, children's rights have gone unrecognized. Not until the latter part of this century has this begun to change.

Children are neither an influential lobbying group nor do they have societal power that allows them to advocate for themselves. Because youth spend the majority of their time in school, educators are the advocates responsible for making school a safe and productive environment. Boys Town is committed to this goal and strives to provide a safe haven for each and every child served. This environment not only is free from abuse, but is one where children can grow spiritually, emotionally, intellectually, and physically. It is a place that respects the rights of a child and employs the most positive and least restrictive practices in educating children. Boys Town's mandate is: "As much freedom as possible, as little restriction as necessary."

▶ Promoting safe environments

The Boys Town approach to promoting safe environments has multiple components. These are:

1. Policies and procedures
2. Training in positive interaction styles
3. Ongoing program evaluation
4. Regular student interviews
5. Staff Practice Inquiries
6. Training in the rights of children

All of these components are integrated into the education systems with the major emphasis on the provision of safe, humane care. Information from these various components is constantly used to update and modify the school program when necessary.

Policies and procedures

The commitment of Boys Town Schools to provide safe environments begins (but does not end) here. Each staff member is made aware of written policies and procedures that relate to protecting the rights of children. These not only emphasize the intent of the education program but also contain the procedures followed when potential policy violations occur. Policies and procedures set in motion other specific components.

Training in positive interaction styles

All staff members are trained in positive techniques for interacting with or helping children change their behavior while respecting their basic dignity, differences, and freedom. (See Chapter 11: "The Teaching Interaction.") Also, all educators are trained to promote positive relationships with each child. (See Chapter 3: "Building and Maintaining Relationships.")

Ongoing program evaluation

Educators are provided with systematic feedback on teaching effectiveness through regular evaluation reports. These reports give all staff insight into the quality of education provided for children. Routine updates on school attendance, academic progress, and behaviors are a valuable method of monitoring overall program quality. One of the features of a humane school is the extent to which it succeeds in reaching the goals for which it was established. Routine reporting of progress on important goals helps a school achieve its goals.

Regular student interviews

Interviews are conducted routinely in the teacher evaluation process. During these interviews, each student is asked whether he or she has experienced any mistreatment by Boys Town staff or others. Each child also is requested to express his or her opinion about the pleasantness and supportiveness of teachers and administrators. These questions provide important information regarding the school atmosphere. The emphasis here is on **how** goals are reached and the methods used. Information derived from these questions can be used to improve staff interaction and communication skills if so indicated.

Staff Practice Inquiries

Any questionable staff practice is followed up by a Staff Practice Inquiry. Staff Practice Inquiries are investigations into situations where the use of inappropriate practices is suspected. These investigations usually result from information contained in a youth report or a consumer report or from observation by staff.

All allegations obtained from any source about less-than-optimal care are investigated thoroughly and promptly. The fact that Boys Town promptly initiates Staff Practice Inquiries makes it clear that Boys Town takes its protective role seriously. The Boys Town practice is to investigate all claims regardless of their perceived validity or their perceived seriousness. Even relatively benign allegations are investigated in order to sensitize all staff members to the importance of maintaining high-quality standards.

It is the collective responsibility of all educators to safeguard the rights of children. Any suspected abuse observed by children, staff, or others should be reported immediately, as mandated by law. When such a report is received, the administration immediately initiates a Staff Practice Inquiry. The child and adult allegedly involved are interviewed along with others who may have relevant information. The facts are established and conclusions reached as quickly as possible. Quick action is important so that any danger or discomfort experienced by a child can be eliminated or so that any harm to a staff member's reputation can be minimized.

Confidentiality is maintained to the greatest degree possible in all Staff Practice Inquiries. Total anonymity can often be maintained. Sometimes anonymity cannot be guaranteed when a child may be at some risk, mainly because relevant persons need some information during the course of the inquiry process. For instance, parents or legal guardians are immediately informed of any allegation. In cases where serious allegations are made, Child Protective Services agencies are informed so that they can decide whether to conduct their own investigation.

Another important phase of Staff Practice Inquiries is the debriefing phase. Verbal and/or written reports are given to persons who have the right to know about any outcomes. It is important that relevant persons are kept informed, not only to protect the interests of the child but also to protect the reputation of any staff members who are involved.

Training in the rights of children

All Boys Town educators who work with children receive training to increase their sensitivity to the rights of children. Typically, this training occurs before educators work with children. Subsequent to training, educators are updated through materials and meetings provided by their administration. Educators are provided with rules about what to do or not to do in specific situations, as well as guidelines that augment the sound judgment required of any person involved in educating students.

The rules and guidelines used at Boys Town are outlined in this chapter. These are not inclusive but give a good overview of the training content. Legal precedent is noted where appropriate.

▶ Boys Town student rights

The goal of a good education program should be to teach children to make good choices and to become self-reliant. Boys Town bases its student rights on this premise; some are further supported by legal precedent. Our student rights are as follows:

1. Right to privacy

2. Right to one's own possessions

Teachers should not conduct routine secret searches of a student's desk, locker, or person. Searches should be in the interest of a child's well-being and should be conducted by an administrator.

Students' right to privacy was challenged under the 4th Amendment by New Jersey vs. TLO (469 US 325, 1985). The United States Supreme Court determined that schools do not act *in loco parentis* and are governed by search and seizure laws. Schools, however, need only have probable cause, rather than reasonable suspicion which law enforcement authorities must have, in order to conduct a search. Student lockers and desks are possessions of both the school and the student during the school year. Although school administrators have the right to search these, this right should be clearly stated in school policy. Children's school records should be released only with the written permission of his/her parent or legal guardian.

It is important to note that students do not waive the right to privacy when bringing personal possessions on to school grounds. However, teachers should help ensure that no student possesses dangerous items (drugs, weapons, etc.) by notifying administrators if they suspect that a student has such items at school. Administrators have the right to confiscate dangerous possessions and turn them over to law enforcement.

Teachers also should see that each student has the necessary school supplies. If a student does not have supplies, the items should be provided by the school and further replacement items purchased by the student .

Teachers may exercise reasonable control over the personal possessions a student brings to class by instructing that the items be turned over to the teacher. The student also could opt to put the items away and take them home at the end of the school day. If a teacher limits or restricts a student's use of a personal item, the student should be told how to earn back the use of the item.

3. Right to freedom of movement

In Boys Town schools, restrictions on break time or recess only occur in response to immediate discipline concerns. These restrictions should not be used routinely or for extended periods of time. Teachers should use time-out very judiciously. Time-out is generally best suited for young children. It involves removing a student from a reinforcing event, not from an aversive event. The key to its appropriate use is to ensure that "time-in" is employed; the classroom must first be a reinforcing environment for the student.

4. Right not to be given meaningless work

Homework, additional work, or meaningless assignments are not given as a punishment to students in Boys Town schools. Assigned work is designed to promote academic progress.

5. Right to Access File Material (The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act, 1974)

School records are made available to students with permission from their parents or legal guardians. Students cannot be forced to sign statements agreeing with behavior plans or school reports. They can, however, sign statements indicating they have read the materials. Students have a right to disagree with information in their file and may sign a formalized statement to that effect. Student files should be treated as confidential.

6. Right to nourishment

Teachers in Boys Town schools may not make lunch contingent on behavior, or serve a less adequate lunch as a behavioral consequence. Access to water cannot be denied, but teachers can set reasonable periods of time for students to obtain drinks.

7. Right to communicate with significant others (6th Amendment)

Students have the right to contact their families and to see school support personnel (administrators, counselors, etc.). School personnel may set times when services are available. Although teachers may not deny students the right to communicate, they may exercise reasonable control over the timing and form of the communication.

8. Right to treatment

Teachers should assist each student's progress toward educational goals. They should set and maintain both academic and behavioral expectations, adjusting Individual Education Plans IEPs when needed to ensure success. Special education students must have an (IEP) and may not be denied an education (Public Law 94-142).

9. Right to interact with others

Extended periods of physical isolation should not be used as a punishment. Separation of the student from the instructional group should be used only for short periods to promote appropriate behavior and academic learning. Teachers should not instruct students to isolate another student as a punishment. Students may, however, be prompted to ignore peer problems.

10. Right to respect of body and person

Physical restraint should be used only as a last resort to prevent a student from harming himself or others. Sarcasm, name-calling, labeling, and any other humiliating verbal statements directed toward a student should be avoided. Corporal punishment should be avoided as a disciplinary action. It is not subject to the 8th Amendment; most states have no laws regulating its use. In the case of Baker vs. Owen (423 US 907, 1975), the Supreme Court decided that corporal punishment could be used without prior parental approval under the following guidelines: 1) it not be used as the first line of punishment, and 2) school officials need to be present to serve as witnesses. Boys Town believes strongly that positive methods should be employed in teaching students prosocial behaviors. Suppressing behavior through coercive means has only a temporary effect; aversive discipline methods generate counter-aggression.

11. Right to natural elements

Teachers should not routinely restrict a student from outdoor activities, except in response to immediate behavioral concerns. Although they can use loss of recess as a behavioral consequence, teachers should not restrict access to recess for extended periods of time.

12. Right to freedom of expression (1st Amendment)

Administrators can regulate freedom of expression associated with curriculum and school activities. They can censor individual expression if it disrupts the educational process or puts the rights or safety of others in jeopardy (Tinker vs. Des Moines, 393 US 503, 1969; Bethel vs. Fraser, 478 US 675, 1986; Hazelwool vs. Kuhlmeier, 484 US 260, 1988).

▶ Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EHCA)

In 1977, Public Law 94-142 established rights for all handicapped children. They have a **right** to a free, appropriate education at public expense that meets state educational standards. This education is provided under an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) developed to meet the needs of the student, not the school district (Federal Register, August 23, 1977). The United States Supreme Court decided in the Board of Education vs. Rowley (458 US 176) in 1982 that the level of services must maximize the potential of the disabled child equal to the opportunities of nondisabled students. Further, the least restrictive environment must be provided to the maximum extent appropriate. Handicapped students also have a **right** to related supportive services that may be required. These include, but are not limited to, transportation, recreation, health, psychological services or counseling, and speech and hearing services.

Students under EHCA also have a **right** to due process, including the inspection of records and reports, prior notice, independent education evaluations, impartial hearings, and the right to appeal the hearing outcome. Students have a **right** to surrogate parent representation in the educational programming process, which is especially critical for students in residential placement.

Handicapped students have a **right** to not be expelled for behavior related to their exceptionality. In Honig vs. Doe (484 US 305, 1988), the Supreme Court determined that special education students cannot be expelled from school programming for more than 10 days, even if they are considered a threat to themselves or others. Suspensions require prior approval, but students may be suspended for up to 10 days without it being considered a change of placement. If a student's suspension exceeds 10 days, the multidisciplinary team must convene to change the child's IEP. For students in the regular education program, minimal procedures are needed for suspensions under 10 days.

More due process is needed for longer suspensions, with most states requiring students to be represented by counsel (Goss vs. Lopez, 419 US 565, 1975). Currently, U.S. courts are strongly debating the rights of students infected with the AIDS virus to attend school and receive protection under the 14th Amendment and the Rehabilitation Act, Section 504. Though courts have determined that students with AIDS are protected by the Rehabilitation Act, much controversy still surrounds these students attending classes. Individual districts should consult their governing laws.

▶ Convention on Rights of the Child

In order for school to be an environment that fosters self-reliance and self-confidence in our future generations, educators must treat students with the dignity and respect that should be afforded any human being. Successful education programs nurture students and encourage belonging, while recognizing that differences make individuals unique. The empowerment and protection of children as a universal agenda is ever increasing. To that end, the United Nations has become a powerful advocacy group in recognizing the rights of children everywhere.

On November 20, 1989, the general assembly of the United Nations created the *Convention on Rights of the Child*. It contains 54 articles; three specifically pertain to education and many have school impact. Because of its importance, it bears reading by all school personnel. The three articles specifically related to education are summarized here:

Article 23 states that disabled children have the right to care, education, and training that will help them enjoy a full life and achieve the greatest degree of self-reliance and social integration possible.

Article 28 provides that children have a right to a free and compulsory education and that school discipline should be consistent with children's rights and dignity.

Article 29 states that children have a right to an education that develops their personalities, talents, and mental and physical abilities. Education should prepare a child for adult life in a free society. It should foster respect for parents, cultural identity, language, and values, as well as promote respect for others.

▶ Summary

Boys Town is concerned about protecting and assuring the free exercise of all rights and privileges of its children. The guidelines and processes described in this chapter provide evidence of this concern. However, success in assuring children's rights is not guaranteed by procedures alone, but comes from the "sense of quality" that is imbued in each educator. Each person should understand that it is his or her competence in developing and carrying out education plans, and diligence in monitoring personal actions and the actions of others that makes the real difference. Rules, guidelines, and procedures are necessary, but it is the commitment to providing the highest quality care possible that affords all students a safe environment in which to maximize their full potential.

CHAPTER THREE

Building and maintaining relationships

Children spend nearly 13,000 hours in school between the ages of 6 and 18 and the majority of those hours are spent with a teacher inside a classroom. The quality of teacher-student relationships significantly affects whether students' needs are met. When students' needs are being met in the classroom, they tend to behave more appropriately and learn more effectively (Jones & Jones, 1990).

The necessity for presenting a chapter on building and maintaining positive teacher-student relationships and creating positive and supportive classroom environments is based on the unfortunate reality that all too often, our classroom environments fail to meet students' basic personal and psychological needs. This is not to say that teachers knowingly or willfully ignore these very critical needs, but rather points out how cliches like, "Be tough," "Be clever," or "Keep them busy and look like you're in charge" — once. presented as simple prescriptions for effectively managing a classroom — have affected our school environments and classroom climates and are still exercised in many educational settings. Teachers' relationships with their students often tend to be directed toward establishing control and fostering compliance rather than focusing on creating a classroom climate that represents an effective blend of warmth, care, and compassion with an appropriate amount of firmness, realistic tolerances, and competent teaching (Shores, Gunter, & Jack, 1993; Steinberg, 1992; Nichols, 1992; Steinberg & Knitzer, 1992).

As a teacher, you adopt and use specific verbal and nonverbal behaviors to elicit appropriate behavior from your students to reinforce positive behavior as it occurs, and to intervene in negative situations. In so doing, the strategies you choose are going to be affected, positively or negatively, by the context in which they are used and the nature and quality of the relationship you have established with your students.

Again, the traditional emphasis on classroom control and the administrative or self-imposed pressures to concentrate on content and get through the curriculum have either minimized the importance of teacher-student relationships or have made it more difficult to understand what role the relationship element has in education.

As much of the research indicates, the effectiveness of your instructional interactions with your students, academic as well as social, is largely dependent on the relationships you develop and maintain with them.

Too many children enter our schools and classrooms excited, eager, and exhibiting a readiness to learn only to later leave feeling disliked and unsuccessful (Morse, 1964; Cormany, 1975; Mortimore & Sammons, 1987; Purkey & Novak, 1984) and, in many instances, having failed academically as well as socially. The traditional emphasis on content and control may make it difficult to see that relationships are important to education, or more specifically, to agree that relationships significantly influence a child's educational experience. Current research indicates that teachers can and do make a difference in many students' lives even when facing the many societal factors that make the job of a classroom teacher more challenging and difficult. Teachers increase their effectiveness when they are provided with information about skills associated with effective teaching and when they receive feedback on how their behavior matches criteria for effective teaching. (Jones & Jones, 1990). This chapter discusses the benefits resulting from strong teacher-student relationships and how to facilitate student learning and personal empowerment, and inspire a positive self-concept.

▶ Benefits of building strong teacher-student relationships

Teaching is an interactive process. The more positive your interactions are with your students, the more assured you can be that your interactions will be effective and mutually reinforcing. How students perceive themselves as learners and unique individuals, how responsibility they assume for their behavior, and how well they learn and perform academically are affected significantly by what occurs at school and in your classroom. Individuals learn more effectively in environments that meet their basic personal and psychological needs (Jones & Jones, 1990). As teachers, you control many of the variables affecting your students' needs, which influence their academic achievement as well as their behavior. The nature and quality of the relationships you establish and maintain with your students form the basis of the climate in your classroom. And, a supportive and positive classroom climate creates an instructional environment that not only meets students' basic needs but also motivates them to demonstrate initiative, take risks, and commit themselves to learning. Strong relationships with your students contribute substantially to your ability to help promote growth and change in every student.

In addition to providing strong evidence that academic achievement and student behavior are influenced by the quality of the teacher-student relationship and that positive teacher-student relationships are associated with more positive student responses to school (Aspy & Roebuck, 1977; Norman & Harris, 1981), a significant body of research also indicates that students prefer teachers who display warm and friendly behavior toward them (Rosenshine, 1970; Norman & Harris, 1981). As Robert Bush (1954) noted in *The Teacher-Pupil Relationships*, "Teachers retain their effectiveness as professional persons only so long as they remain warmly human, sensitive to the personal needs of children, and skillful in establishing effective relationships."

The above findings also highlight the importance of modeling theory and its influence on the quality of the teacher-student relationship. Children not only learn by doing, they also learn by watching others. Much of a child's learning occurs by observing and subsequently modeling the behavior of the adults in his or her life. Research by Bandura (1969, 1977) indicates that individuals tend to emulate behavior of significant others — individuals who they perceive as competent, trusting, and who provide a major source of support, direction, and reinforcement. Teachers not only embody these qualities, but also are in an excellent position, second only to that of the child's family, to serve as role models for their students. When students have positive feelings about their school and their teachers, they are more likely to identify with and accept them as important role models. Furthermore, kids tend to model behavior if they think adults benefit by performing these behaviors (Jones & Jones, 1990), and they also are more likely to model behavior exhibited by several adults (Bronfenbrenner, 1970). These variables illustrate how important it is for you, as well as your colleagues throughout the school, to engage in skills and behaviors that create and maintain a positive and supportive environment for the students. Not only do positive relationships increase the effectiveness of your role-modeling, but your students' receptivity to more direct teaching also improves. Students will be more likely to accept your feedback, whether it takes the form of a compliment, praise or recognition for effort, an instruction to redo an assignment, or a Teaching Interaction to correct a socially inappropriate behavior. (See Chapter 11: "The Teaching Interaction.")

While it is true that positive teacher-student relationships will enhance the opportunity for all students to achieve a greater degree of academic and social competence, such relationships become even more critical for those students who enter your classroom with many unmet needs and a variety of behaviors that interfere with their social-emotional development and academic achievement. By improving the quality of your interactions with students, you can significantly increase the amount of productive student behavior (Jones & Jones, 1990). Developing positive relationships with your students, however, will clearly not resolve all classroom problems nor prevent issues from occurring. Again, your concern, caring, and understanding must be delicately balanced with realistic limits, clear and specific expectations, and competent teaching.

How relationships develop

Relationships do not develop over the course of a few days, weeks, or even months. Nor can a relationship ever be considered to be "developed." Rather, a relationship can be viewed as continually developing over time and across events and issues that arise as you interact with your students. Two key variables that significantly influence how relationships with your students evolve over time are, 1) the personal or affective quality of the relationship, and 2) how you communicate or relate to your students.

Generally speaking, there is a common set of behaviors and attitudes that are both socially acceptable and generally valued by members of our society. These behaviors and values include such concepts as honesty, sensitivity, concern and respect for others, a sense of humor, reliability, willingness to listen, and so on. Many students enter our schools and classrooms not yet having developed such values and behaviors because of poor role models, damaged learning histories, or simply because they have not had the benefit of someone to guide them through a particular phase of development. As with so many other life skills, it becomes the school's responsibility — your responsibility — to teach students the skills needed to develop positive adult and peer relationships. While continuing to focus on the teaching of these critical skills, you also must maintain a high rate of positive interactions with your students, create opportunities during the school day when they can engage in open, personal discussions with you, and demonstrate a genuine interest in their activities.

Using quality components

While the components of Teaching Interactions (Chapter 11) and Effective Praise (Chapter 9) can build relationships, one could use such "procedural" components and still not build relationships. Such teaching procedures must be accompanied by quality components or effective communication skills. Quality components are the positive verbal and nonverbal behaviors that accompany the procedural components. Such quality components include looking at the student, answering his or her questions pleasantly and enthusiastically, having a pleasant facial expression, smiling and using humor when appropriate, expressing concern and empathy, displaying appropriate physical contact such as a hug, an arm on the shoulder, a "high five," and so on.

The importance of using effective communication skills to enhance teacher-student relationships cannot be overemphasized. Warm, caring, open interpersonal interactions are critical in meeting many of your students' individual need from the most basic needs such as his security and safety to the need to belong, to feel that he is unique, and to develop self-esteem.

Maintaining a high ratio of positive to negative statements

Children of all ages are sensitive to praise and criticism from adults. Unfortunately, many adults, teachers included, tend to notice disruptive or inappropriate behavior more often than they notice or comment on positive behavior. Research indicates that frequent negative remarks by teachers are usually accompanied by student's dislike for school. Also, while we tend to believe that criticism will improve a students' behavior, research in fact suggests that the opposite is true. For example, in one class, students' off-task behavior increased from 8.7 percent to 25.5 percent when the teacher withdrew praise for on-task behavior. Concurrently, when the same teacher was asked to increase his criticism of off-task behavior; off-task behavior increased from between 31.2 to 50 percent (Becker, Engelmann, & Thomas, 1975).

Unfortunately, negative interactions not only have a negative effect on a students' self-concept, but also contribute to a generally negative and unpleasant classroom environment, one in which the teacher is actually responsible for the increase in disruptive student behavior.

A more detailed explanation of the usefulness of providing students with positive feedback as well as an effective process for doing so is included in Chapter 9, "Effective Praise."

Other elements of a positive relationship

As with any relationship, it is important to have shared experiences and "remember when" times to further enhance strong teacher-student relationships. One important way you can show interest and concern for your students is by taking the time to attend activities in which they are involved, both in and out of school. These might include sports, drama activities, dance recitals, scouting events, and so on. Evidence indicates that attending students' activities is often associated with dramatic improvement of those students. (Jones & Jones, 1990.)

Eating lunch with students or participating in playground activities also are excellent ways for you to show that you are "human" and that you do like to have fun. This participation not only affords an excellent opportunity to strengthen positive relationships, but also provides a natural setting in which you can model and teach cooperation, sportsmanship, and appropriate playground behavior.

Introducing yourself and welcoming the class through letters or notes sent to students prior to the beginning of the school year or semester, or giving notes at other appropriate times, such as when a student has accomplished a particularly difficult task, shown significant behavioral improvement, or been elected to student council, also helps build and strengthen relationships. Greeting students individually at the door each morning or prior to the beginning of the period and offering some kind of positive statement also lets them know you care and that you're concerned about them. You also can demonstrate your interest in your students, as well as enjoy a good time with them, by participating in school activities such as "hat day," carnivals, and other special events sponsored by student council, various clubs, or other student groups.

Finally, relationship development also is an important part of dealing with problem behavior. As noted earlier in this chapter, the use of effective communication skills and quality components when using Teaching Interactions and Effective Praise contributes significantly to positive relationships. Furthermore, even when addressing ongoing behavior or potentially out-of-control behavior, you should use large amounts of empathy and praise to maintain and continue to develop positive relationships with students during these difficult times.

▶ Summary

Building strong relationships with your students is one of the more important aspects of the Boys Town Education Model. This is because strong relationships with your students allow you to accomplish so many other goals. Relationships contribute much to the overall effectiveness of your teaching. Students cannot reach their full potential in school unless you and the other adults in your school encouragingly invite them to do so.

Problem-solving

During recess, two fifth-graders are chosen to be on the same kickball team; both want to pitch and they begin to argue. On the way to fourth-period PE class, several students approach another student and ask him to skip class with them; the student doesn't want to, but he also doesn't want to lose face with friends. Before school, one student asks a classmate to do a book report for her and offers to pay for it; the classmate would like to have the money but is afraid of getting caught. During lunch, two students observe an older student aggressively attempting to extort money from a new student; one of the observers wants to report the event, the other doesn't.

Problems like the ones described above are not unusual. Students face conflict, confusion, difficult choices, and a wide array of other problematic situations every day. And, like it or not, as teachers, administrators, counselors, and other school staff, you invest as much time throughout the school day assisting students with problem mediation and social adjustment as you do with advancing their academic progress. Schools provide a unique environment for fostering social adjustment and problem-solving skills in children, since so many of the social interactions and events that occur can be monitored and used as real-life teaching and learning opportunities.

Problem-solving is a lifetime skill, one that students can use in or out of school, now or 10 years from now. There is no question that problem-solving skills are valuable to one's adjustment. It has been said that psychological health is related to a problem-solving sequence consisting of the abilities to recognize and admit a problem, reflect on problem solutions, make a decision, and take action (Kendall & Braswell, 1982). Furthermore, problem-solving ability might be among the factors that contribute to an individual's use of prosocial, rather than antisocial, behavior (Goldstein, 1988). Some research suggests that improved problem-solving skills among students can lead to improved classroom behavior (Spivack & Schure, 1974). Caldwell (cited in Spivack & Schure, 1974) found that as alternative thinking improved, disrespect, defiance, inattentiveness, withdrawal, and overreliance on others all decreased. Inadequate problem-solving skills generally result in a student relying on socially inappropriate and ineffective solutions to real-life problems, particularly solutions that are aggressive or coercive in nature. Students with behavior problems have difficulty perceiving as many options, or the same kinds of options or behavioral options, as others, and are more likely to demonstrate rigid thought patterns (Spivack & Schure, 1974).

Why do so many of our students lack the requisite skills needed to effectively solve problems? One of the most obvious reasons for this may be modeling. For example, if a student frequently has seen others use withdrawal and submissiveness to solve a problem, he is apt to use this option when bullied by a bigger student who is demanding money. A student who comes from an environment in which individuals settle disagreements and obtain what they want through arguing and fighting — even though she may realize these solutions are unacceptable — may perceive aggression as her only option when another student on her kickball team also wants to pitch. These examples may help point out why many students may persist in their inappropriate responses to problems by submitting or retaliating, or why they may not even be aware that a problem exists. These students need to be taught how to identify and/or solve problems.

If students have an operational process or plan they can use when they face a challenge in or out of school, they are more likely to successfully recognize and resolve problems. Problem-solving also can be used retrospectively to help students make better decisions in the future.

It also is important to note that there are situations and times when problem-solving may not be appropriate as the first level of intervention. These include situations when you are attempting to teach a new skill to an individual or to the entire class; in such situations, Preventive Teaching (Chapter 10), not problem- solving, is the appropriate procedure. You also should not have a student use problem-solving when dealing with inappropriate behaviors such as skill deficiencies (e.g. not accepting criticism, not accepting "No" for an answer, etc.), rule violations, or inattentive ongoing behavior. Such student behaviors require the consistent, concerned use of Teaching Interactions (Chapter 11). At times, you may be tempted to help a student problem-solve when he or she is out of control, especially when the student is passive, withdrawn, crying, or complaining about unfairness. (See Chapter 12, "Ongoing Behavior.") In such cases, it is important to stay focused, regain the student's attention and cooperation, and complete the various teaching agendas. Later, when the student is calm and has fully regained control of his or her behavior, you may choose or the student may ask you to initiate a problem-solving session.

There are times when students face serious problems. In such cases, you probably will not, and should not, feel comfortable discussing the problem with the student alone, and should seek the assistance and support of the school counselor, psychologist, or another qualified professional in the community. These problems could include trying to work through the serious illness or death of a friend or family member, parents' separation or divorce, or loss of a boyfriend/girlfriend. A final example is suicide ideation, which in and of itself is so serious that it requires immediate contact for professional help, as outlined in your school district policies and procedures. In fact, anytime you feel uncomfortable with a situation a student has brought to you, contact a qualified school or professional person in the community who can assist the student with the issue.

What is problem-solving?

Problem-solving can be defined as a behavioral process that offers a variety of potentially effective options for dealing with a problem, and increases the probability of selecting the most effective solutions from among the various options (D'Zurilla & Goldfried, 1971). Most of the research on problem-solving describes a process which includes the following five stages or competencies: 1) problem identification or general orientation, 2) problem definition, 3) generation of alternatives, 4) evaluation of the solutions, and 5) decision-making (Spivack & Schure, 1974).

The Boys Town Education Model uses the **SODAS** method, a revision of a counseling process developed by J.B. Roosa (1973), to teach students the general skill of problem-solving. **SODAS** is an acronym for the following steps:

S — Defining the problem **situation**.

O — Examining **options** available to deal with the problem.

D — Determining the **disadvantages** of each option.

A — Determining the **advantages** of each option.

S — Deciding on the **solution/simulation**.

This general framework for problem-solving has a great deal of utility and flexibility. You can use the process to conduct group problem-solving, discussions such as those that occur during a class conference, or peer mediation sessions. Students also can use the skill components to solve **interpersonal** conflicts, such as how to deal with being asked to skip school, or **intrapersonal** problems, such as when a student loses her homework or forgets her PE uniform.

Regardless of whether the problem involves the entire class or an individual student, or is interpersonal or intrapersonal in nature, the primary focus of your teaching should be on using the process and teaching the students how to effectively use the **SODAS** method.

Situation

The problem-solving process begins with you helping the student clearly define the situation or problem, assuming that the student is able to recognize that a problem exists. Not all students possess this skill and this may be where you need to start. A problem can be defined for students as a situation in which they need to do something to get what they want, but they don't know what to do or how to do it (Kaplan, 1991).

Before a student can be expected to engage in the skill of problem recognition, he or she must first must be able to recognize that a problem situation exists. In other words, the student must be able to determine whether or not a problem exists.

For example, you might present your students with pairs of situations like the following for discussion.

Situation #1:

"You get home from school Tuesday and realize that you left your science book in your locker and you have a unit test on Wednesday. Is this a problem? Why or why not?"

Situation #2:

"You get home from school on Tuesday and realize that you left your science book in your locker at school and you have a unit test on Friday. Is this a problem? Why or why not?"

When helping younger students to recognize instances and non-instances of problems, more concrete examples and specific teaching, such as the use of pictures paired with a direct instructional approach, is probably more appropriate. For example, showing elementary students a picture of a child being bullied by older kids on the playground and saying to the students, "Here's a problem situation. Several older kids start picking on you during recess. You want them to stop doing this but you don't know what to do to get them to stop. Why is this a problem for you?"

Before moving on to having your students define the problem situation, it is critical that they are competent in recognizing problems.

Once students can determine whether a problem exists, they are ready to define the problem or situation. This skill component is extremely important; many students who have difficulty problem-solving know a problem exists but don't define it correctly. Oftentimes, students tend to leave themselves out of the problem, or their description of the problem is very vague and emotional (e.g. "I hate math class," "None of the boys in my class like me," "My PE teacher isn't fair and he always picks on me.").

To help a student pinpoint the specific problem, you can use general clarifying questions or statements to help the student more clearly focus on the issues (e.g. "Why don't you explain that further?"). However, it frequently may be necessary to ask more direct, specific questions to help the student talk about his or her issues (e.g. "Why do you hate math class?" or "Why do you think your PE teacher is unfair and picks on you?").

While exploring the situation with the student, it is extremely important that you engage in supportive verbal and nonverbal behaviors that communicate empathy, concern, and encouragement. Without these relationship quality interaction variables, your questions may become more like an interrogation that could cause the student to withdraw.

As the student more clearly defines the situation, you need to summarize what the student is saying. Such a summarization is particularly important before any options are discussed. The summarization helps you assure that all the relevant information has been reviewed and that you accurately perceive the student's situation. If the summarization is inaccurate or incomplete, the student then has the opportunity to correct any misperceptions. This is especially important at this point since the remainder of the process is built around the defined situation. Without an accurate or clearly defined situation, it will be difficult to generate useful options and a viable solution.

Options

The ability to generate a list of alternatives or options is probably the single most important problem-solving skill. The cognitive skill of knowing what to do in case of failure is one that can prevent or decrease a student's frustration level or the need to engage in withdrawn or impulsive behavior. Spivack and Schure (1974) consider this skill: 1) the most powerful prediction of maladaptive behavior; 2) the skill that is best enhanced through training; and 3) the one that, when fostered, seems to also result in the greatest improvement in student classroom behavior. Knowing how to pursue or select alternative options also may be all the encouragement a student needs to keep on trying and not give up (Kaplan, 1991).

Once the situation is clearly defined, you should help the student generate options in the form of potential solutions to the problem. It is important to have the student generate the option that might solve the problem. Remember that the goal is to have the student develop his or her ability to solve problems as well as arrive at a solution.

To help students generate options, specifically ask the student how he or she might solve the problem or deal with the situation (e.g. "Can you think of a way to handle that?" or "What do you think you can do about this?"). After the student suggests an option, you need to continue to solicit options (e.g. "Can you think of any other ideas?").

Initially, students may have difficulty generating options or generating more than one option. Also, the suggestions offered may not be very helpful or realistic. Whenever a student gives an option, it is very important that you remain nonjudgmental. You can remain nonjudgmental by commenting positively about the student's participation in the process (e.g. "Well good, you've come up with a second option. You're really trying to think this through."). You also can offer a neutral comment and a prompt for more options (e.g. "Okay, that's one option. Can you think of another one?").

Remaining nonjudgmental can be very difficult, especially when the student suggests an option that would only result in more problems for him or her (e.g. "I'll just have to punch him out."). You need to remember that your role at this point is just to get the student to generate options. In that sense, this phase of the process is like "brainstorming." The next phase of examining the advantages and disadvantages will allow you to help the student judge the "wisdom" of his or her suggested options.

During the option phase, you may give your suggestions as well. However, this should be done only after the student has given all of his or her ideas. You may want to phrase the option as a question (e.g. "How about talking to your math teacher after class?") so that the student feels involved in the process. Over time, students will be better able to generate options and will be more comfortable doing so.

Once students can generate three or four different options for every situation or problem, they should be considered competent at this skill. Children as young as four are considered capable of developing this skill (Spivack & Schure, 1974).

Disadvantages and advantages

Once students are capable of generating several options to a problem, they need to learn how to evaluate or analyze the advantages and disadvantages of each option. Each option should be evaluated according to two basic criteria: 1) efficacy, i.e. "Will this solution help me achieve my goal without causing me any additional problems?", and 2) feasibility, i.e. "Will I be able to take the action outlined in my options?" (Kaplan, 1991).

Your role is to help the student think through the efficacy and feasibility of each option. In a sense, you are attempting to teach the student that there is a cause-and-effect relationship between his or her decisions and what happens to him or her. As in generating options, it is important to have the student think through the advantages and disadvantages, with you skillfully guiding that process. If the student has difficulty thinking through the advantages and disadvantages, you can help by asking more specific questions (e.g. "Well, what do you think would happen if you told your PE teacher off or just didn't go to that class anymore?").

There may be a number of advantages and disadvantages for any given option. Again, since the goal is to help the student learn to think, it also is important in this phase to solicit additional advantages and disadvantages (e.g. "Can you think of any other advantages; any other problems?").

During this process, it is important for you to remain nonjudgmental and not argue with a student about his or her perceptions of the advantages and disadvantages. This can be difficult when the student seems enthusiastic about the unrealistic advantages of an option (e.g. "Yeah, it'd be great to fight it out because then he'd leave me alone and everybody would think I was bad."). Rather than argue about an advantage, you can simply acknowledge the student's view (e.g. "Okay, so you think that an advantage would be..."). Later, you can guide the student's judgment during the discussion of the disadvantages (e.g. "What happens if you don't win?" or "Could you get hurt?" or "What will your boss do if he hears you've fought with another employee?").

If a student clearly does not see or cannot verbalize an important advantage or disadvantage, you should offer your viewpoint and allow the student to react.

After discussing the disadvantages and advantages for the options, you should summarize by reviewing each option and the associated advantages and disadvantages. This summary review further helps the student see the cause-and-effect relationships.

Solution/simulation

The last step in the **SODAS** process involves having the student select the solution and prepare to successfully implement it by conducting any necessary "simulations" or role-play sessions. As a result of examining advantages and disadvantages, the student typically selects a workable option. It may not always be the best option from your point of view, but it is more important that it is the student's option. The student is more likely to be committed to make an option work if he or she is truly comfortable with it and feels ownership for the choice.

After the student has selected an option, you should encourage and reassure the student that the solution can be successfully implemented. In making the student comfortable with the solution, you can answer any questions the student may have about how to successfully implement it.

Another important aspect of improving the student's chance of success is for you to set up a role-play or practice session. These role-play sessions should be as realistic as possible. Often, you will know the people the student will need to interact with when implementing the solution (e.g. parents, friend, employers, principals, other teachers). Because you know these individuals, you can simulate their behaviors. For example, if an employer is fairly abrupt and somewhat stern, you can best help the student by portraying the employer in that manner. The role-play can be made more realistic by presenting the student with several possible responses so that he or she will be more comfortable and more likely to succeed.

Remember to express confidence in the student's ability to implement the solution. However, don't promise that the solution will work. As the practice session ends, you should prompt the student to check back after trying to implement the solution. If the student succeeds in solving the problem, praise him or her for doing so and for going through the problem-solving session. If the solution is not workable, be very supportive and empathic. You and the student can then return to the **SODAS** format to find a more successful solution.

Learning to problem-solve is a complex task, but as mentioned earlier in this chapter, it is a lifetime skill and one that is critical to your students' eventual success. Because participating in the problem-solving process is so important, it would be reasonable to have students earn significant positive consequences for demonstrating this skill. Since many students have "solved" their problems in inappropriate ways in the past (e.g. running away, becoming aggressive), it is important to positively reinforce a student who indicates he or she would like to discuss a problem (e.g. "I'm having a problem with my PE teacher" or "I'm having a problem at my job. Can you talk with me about it?").

The complete use of the **SODAS** format during a problem-solving session is very important in teaching rational problem-solving skills to your students. When using the **SODAS** process, it is critical that you remember to always engage in supportive verbal and nonverbal behaviors that communicate care, concern, and empathy. In addition, two important distinctions related to how you teach and guide your students in the problem-solving process need to be made at this point. First, students should be encouraged to generate **their own** options to **their own** problems rather than you always telling them what they should do or what you think is the best solution. Students need to take ownership of their behavior. When they begin to generate alternatives, they are more likely to learn that they do have a certain amount of control over what happens to them. They also are learning critical thinking skills. Second, the emphasis again must be on teaching the students the process or skill of how to problem-solve rather than judging the solution itself. Students must be allowed to make mistakes or poor decisions in the process of learning how to make the most effective or reasonably "correct" decision.

Aside from formal problem-solving sessions, there are many other types of formal and informal activities that facilitate modeling and direct teaching of the **SODAS** process. Informally, there will be opportunities for discussion that may be prompted by television programs or current events. As your students express their opinions and points of view, you will be confronted with ideal opportunities to encourage your students to think, to weigh options, and to discuss the possible ramifications of their views and values.

While your students may possess the skills necessary to solve problem situations they face, the fact that they have these skills in their behavioral repertoire is not a guarantee that they will use them when confronted with a problem. Following are several factors to keep in mind as you work with your students on the difficult skill of problem-solving.

1. Model problem-solving for your students. Whenever appropriate, use should use SODAS or other cognitive behavior management strategies. Talk with your students about situations in which you are using or have used SODAS to work through a problem.

2. Take the time to provide specific teaching for your students in the SODAS process. Assess their skills on a regular basis and provide follow-up teaching as needed.

3. Look for every opportunity to praise your students for their spontaneous use of SODAS or other appropriate cognitive behavioral strategies throughout the day.

4. Promote generalization by encouraging your students to use their problem-solving skills outside of the classroom and the school setting. Assign homework or provide opportunities to engage in other activities that require your students to use these skills with peers as well as adults.

Summary

Students must be taught how to solve problems. Problem-solving is an invaluable skill that students will need to have and use both in and out of school for the rest of their lives. In fact, problem-solving is so critical to students' health and successful adjustment and social competence that it is probably one of the single most important learning experiences you can provide for your students, even more important than many other areas of the curriculum you are currently teaching.

In summary, problem-solving has two important goals — to help students arrive at sound solutions to their problems and to teach them how to solve their problems in a systematic, rational way. The **SODAS** process, coupled with important relationships variables (e.g. active listening, empathy, concern), can help you accomplish these goals. And, because such problem-solving sessions also promote and establish trust between you and the student, critical relationship-building also occurs.

Principles of behavior

The Boys Town Education Model has its foundation in social learning theory. This chapter will define the major components of this theory in order to provide a perspective on how current behaviors of youth are maintained, how to identify behaviors that may need to be changed, and how to institute a behavior-change process with these youth.

In order to understand and effectively use this theory, one must look at various concepts of the word "learned." A commonly held concept is that if a particular behavior has been taught, then it should have been learned. In the Boys Town approach, a behavior is believed to be learned when it has been successfully demonstrated over time in appropriate settings. When children have problems with a math concept, teachers generally go back and analyze their teaching approach, change it, and reteach the math concept. However, when children have problems engaging in appropriate social skills for the classroom, teachers are generally not as willing to analyze their teaching approach to the problem. They may assume that the skills students do not know should have already been taught and therefore learned. The Boys Town approach encourages a reteaching process, without the assumptions of learning, until appropriate behaviors are successfully demonstrated over time.

Three-term contingency or the ABC pattern

Behavior does not occur in a void. Events that precede a behavior and events that follow a behavior impact on the future occurrence of that behavior. To fully understand the behavior itself, one must know what happens in the environment prior to the behavior as well as what occurs following the behavior. It is helpful for educators to think of the ABC or three-term contingency pattern:

A = Antecedents — the events or conditions present in the environment before a behavior occurs

B = Behavior — what is done or said by a person

C = Consequences — the results, outcomes, or effects following a behavior

Behavior always occurs as a part of a contingency. The universe, according to social learning theorists, is a determined orderly place in which events do not just randomly happen. They happen as a part of a relationship to other events. We call this relationship a contingency. Contingencies are responsible for our learning histories as the probability of the occurrence of behavior is determined by its history of consequences (Cooper, Heron, & Heward,1987).

Antecedents

The situation or context in which behavior occurs qualifies as the antecedent to that behavior. These conditions or events can be simple or complex, recent or historical. When analyzing the antecedents of a behavior, pay particular attention to who was present, what activities were occurring, the time of day or season of the year, and the location or physical setting.

Each of these alone or in conjunction with one another can set the occasion for particular behaviors to occur. The more you know about the history of a student, the greater your understanding of the previous learning that has occurred with that student. Learning history can play a role in the antecedents of current behavior.

While all the antecedents for a behavior may be complex, a more simple stimulus (or set of stimuli) often may immediately precede a behavior. A doorbell ringing immediately precedes someone standing to answer the door, a smiling face on a student first thing in the morning sets the occasion for a greeting, a green light at an intersection precedes the continuance of pressure on the gas pedal in the car, a student arguing with a teacher after an instruction is given precedes the teacher's behavior of intervening and teaching how to follow an instruction.

Behavior

What is behavior? Behavior is anything a person does or says that can be directly or indirectly observed (i.e. seen,heard, felt, touched, or smelled) and measured. For example, a teacher can observe the behavior of writing numbers on a math assignment directly by watching the action as it occurs or indirectly by noting the physical results of the behavior — in this case, by seeing a completed math worksheet.

Consequences

Consequences are environmental changes that occur after a behavior in a relatively immediate, temporal sequence that alters the probability of future occurrence of that behavior (Cooper, Heron, & Heward, 1987). Consequences take one of two forms:

1. A new stimulus is presented or added to the environment, such as a student earning free time on the computer following the completion of a class assignment.
2. An already present stimulus is terminated or removed from the environment, such as a student losing the privilege of going to the water fountain because he did not accept criticism from his teacher about staying on task.

Consequences will either increase or decrease the future rate of a particular behavior. When consequences increase the likelihood of the behavior occurring again, this is called " reinforcement." When a consequence decreases the likelihood of that behavior occurring again, this is termed "punishment."

Consequences can be natural or applied. Natural consequences are the typical outcomes of a behavior without any intentional human intervention. For example, scrapes and bruises are the natural consequences of falling down on a cement sidewalk; falling backwards is a natural consequence of leaning back too far in a chair.

Applied consequences for behavior are outcomes that are purposefully arranged. In the Boys Town Education Model, applied consequences can take the form of privileges the students earn for engaging in appropriate classroom behavior or appropriate academic tasks. They also can take the form of privilege losses for not completing academic tasks to a set criteria, for not engaging in appropriate classroom behavior.

Using the ABC or three-term contingency pattern

Understanding the ABC pattern can help educators clarify why a behavior occurs. More importantly, it will aid them in helping their students change their behaviors. Many students engage in classroom behaviors that, if generalized, will isolate them from family, friends, school activities, and their community at large. Due to various circumstances at home, some of these students have no one other than their teachers to help them make the needed changes for success. Using the ABC pattern helps teachers promote change in positive, effective, and efficient ways.

Teachers can help students change their behavior by manipulating antecedents, consequences, or both. Frequently, we think changing the consequence will work, and then are sometimes surprised when we don't get the result we wanted. But there may be times when altering the antecedents is a more effective way to change behavior. An example might be a person who is having trouble getting out of bed in the morning and who keeps hitting the snooze button on the alarm instead of getting up. He could change the antecedent by moving the alarm clock to the other side of the room. This would make it more difficult for him to immediately go back to sleep because he would have to get up and walk across the room to hit the snooze button. Since he is already up, it may encourage him to stay awake. Another example of changing antecedents occurs in particular social situations, such as a school pep rally. Behaviors that should occur during the pep rally can be rehearsed ahead of time and the most relevant behaviors can be pointed out and discussed. Cues and subtle signals that will prompt appropriate behavior at the rally can be explained to the students.

In each behavior, the antecedent conditions have been altered to help achieve the desired behavioral change. We call this Preventive Teaching and will discuss this in greater detail later in the book.

Changing consequences also can be effective. Specific verbal praise can be given when a student appropriately gets your attention. A student can earn a positive consequence for following your instructions to begin an assignment. Likewise, a student may lose a privilege for arguing with you about completing an assignment. By changing the consequences, you can help change a student's behavior.

The Boys Town Education Model has many built-in uses of the ABC pattern. For difficult student problems, unique problems, or recurring problems, use the ABC pattern to analyze the problem behavior and come up with a solution to help the student change.

▶ Some principles of behavior

Principles of behavior are the fundamental laws concerning the nature of behavior. They specify the relationships between behavior, the circumstances that surround that behavior, and the resulting outcomes. These principles are critical for educators as they approach the complex task of helping students change their behavior by instituting a behavior-change procedure (Cooper, Heron, & Heward, 1987). See Figure 1 for a chart of behavioral terms. Educators can use the techniques of positive and negative reinforcement to increase behavior, and positive and negative punishment to decrease behavior. They can use the techniques of generalization and discrimination processes to teach appropriate behavior for many different social situations. They also can use extinction, shaping, and fading techniques to help the student learn to respond to naturally occurring environmental reinforcers.

▶ Positive reinforcement

Positive reinforcement means providing consequences immediately after a behavior to increase the likelihood that the behavior will occur again in the future. If the behavior occurs more often or gets stronger, then it can be assumed that the behavior was "reinforced" by the consequences. Therefore, if a behavior increases, regardless of what the consequence was, it has been reinforced.

Positive reinforcement can occur with natural or applied consequences. An example of a natural consequence for positive reinforcement is the rewarding feeling a high school basketball player gets when he makes a free throw that wins the game. The crowd cheers and his teammates pat him on the back. The results of this public praise will motivate him to continue playing basketball

Figure 1

Matrix of Behavioral Terms

	Pleasant/Positive stimulus or event	**Unpleasant/Negative stimulus or event**
Presenting or Applying	**Term used:** Positive Reinforcement **Behavioral result:** Acts to strengthen the response **Examples:** Hugs, praise, points, etc.	**Term used:** Punishment **Behavioral result:** Weakens or may terminate the response but is highly susceptible to side effects **Examples:** Reprimands, threats, corporal punishment, etc.
Withdrawing or Removing	**Term used:** Response Cost **Behavior result:** Weakens or terminates the response **Examples:** Loss of points, traffic tickets, time out, etc.	**Term used:** Negative Reinforcement **Behavior result:** Acts to strengthen the response **Examples:** Turning off a noisy radio; doing something that stops a baby from crying in church, etc.

at school. An example of an applied consequence is a teacher's promise to a student that finishing an assignment in 10 minutes will earn her 10 minutes of computer time. When the student finishes her assignment on time, she gets to use the computer. This will help motivate the student to complete other assignments in a timely fashion.

Positive reinforcement can help a student learn a new behavior or maintain appropriate behavior. Figure 1 reviews this concept.

These are some conditions that impact the effectiveness of positive reinforcement:

1. Appropriateness of the reinforcer. Rewards need to be individualized to make sure they are, in fact, reinforcing for the student. Determining appropriate reinforcers can be accomplished by asking the student, observing the student during he or she free time, letting the student try a variety of reinforcers without displaying a certain behavior, having the student pick from a preset menu, and just trying out reinforcers and observing the results from using them.

2. Immediacy of the reinforcer. To maximize their effectiveness, reinforcers need to be used immediately after the behavior you want to see increase. The more time that passes between the occurrence of the behavior and the reinforcer, the less effective the reinforcer is in strengthening the behavior. For example, it is the immediate verbal praise following the correct answer that makes a student want to learn the material being taught. Points are such an effective reinforcer because they can be given immediately after a behavior.

3. Amount or size of the reinforcer. The size of the reinforcer should fit the behavior. The longer the behavior takes to perform, the newer the behavior is for a student, or the more difficult it is to perform, the larger the reward should be.

4. Reinforcement contingencies. If reinforcement is to be effective, the student must receive the reinforcer only after performing the target behavior. A contingency is an "if...then" statement; if you do the behavior, then you get the consequence. For instance, "If you remain in your seat until I finish the lecture, then you may go to the shelf and get your journal." Be careful to make positive consequences contingent upon positive behavior. You also must analyze negative behavior to determine whether you may be giving rewards that are inadvertently reinforcing or strengthening that negative behavior.

5. Reinforcement deprivation and satiation. In order to maximize the effectiveness of a reinforcer, an individual must experience some level of deprivation prior to delivery of the reinforcer. If a child has been playing computer games for the last 20 minutes, adding more computer time as a reinforcer might not be effective because the child may have become "satiated" with computer time. The concept of satiation also refers to the use of reinforcers when they are most in demand by the students. An example might be use of a compact disc recording as a reinforcer for one week of homework completion. If the CD is Frank Sinatra's greatest hits instead of a popular rock group's latest work, it probably would not be in demand by the teenage student. Thus, the CD would not be considered an effective reinforcer for the homework completion. The effectiveness of positive consequences is maximized by using a variety of reinforcers and by using those that are most in demand by students at the moment.

6. Use of the Premack Principle. This is better known as "Grandma's Law" and is another way to fully utilize positive reinforcement. The Premack Principle states that access to high-frequency behavior is contingent upon the occurrence of low-frequency behavior; for example, telling a student, "You may go to recess as soon as you finish questions one through five at the end of the chapter." The concept behind this principle is that a high-frequency behavior (i.e. going to recess) can serve as a reinforcer for a low-frequency behavior (completing assigned schoolwork).

Schedules of reinforcement

Schedules of reinforcement simply refer to how often reinforcers are given to a student. There are two basic schedules of reinforcement used to deliver reinforcers. One is a "continuous schedule," where a reinforcer is given every time the youth displays the targeted response. A continuous schedule of reinforcement is critical when teaching a new behavior or skill to the student. You should reinforce the student each time the new behavior is performed to strengthen and encourage the use of the new behavior.

Once the behavior or skill has been established and consistent use is demonstrated, the reinforcement can move to an "intermittent schedule." On an intermittent schedule, targeted behaviors and skills are reinforced only some of the times they occur. For example, reinforcers may be provided every other time or every third time the behavior is performed, the first time the behavior occurs each hour, after two or three days of school attendance, or on any other schedule based on frequency or time. This may seem a bit contradictory, but intermittent schedules of reinforcement actually strengthen a behavior or skill more than continuous schedules. The element of surprise and not knowing when the reinforcer is coming keeps the student's performance of the behavior or skill occurring on a more consistent basis. Intermittent schedules of reinforcement also help fade (a concept that will be discussed later in the chapter) the consequences to a more reality-based schedule where reinforcers are not provided each time a youngster does something well.

Types of reinforcers

There are two basic types of reinforcers — primary and secondary. Primary reinforcers are unlearned events that, by virtue of their biological importance, serve as consequences that increase the likelihood the behavior that precedes them will occur again. Food, water, oxygen, and warmth are examples of events that do no have to undergo a process to make them reinforcing (Cooper, Heron, & Heward, 1987). In a state of deprivation, they reinforce behavior automatically. With primary reinforcers, it is not necessary for the individual to be aware that these events are reinforcing.

Secondary or "conditioned" reinforcers are neutral events that have acquired reinforcing potential because they have been matched (paired) with primary reinforcers or previously established secondary reinforcers. There are four kinds of secondary reinforcers:

1. Tangible reinforcers are objects or activities that increase the probability that the behavior preceding them will occur again. Some examples of tangible reinforcers are trinkets, pins, emblems, marbles, and toys.

2. Activity oriented reinforcers are events or privileges such as helping the teacher, playing a game, or having lunch with an administrator. Many activity reinforcers do not have a direct cost so they can be used with programs that may not have the resources to purchase tangible reinforcers.

3. Social reinforcers maintain motivation to engage in appropriate behaviors on a daily basis. There are three kinds of social reinforcers. They are physical contacts (handshakes, pats on the back, etc.), proximity (standing or sitting near an individual), and verbal statements ("Good job," "Very good," etc.). Verbal statements can be either informational or affirmative. An example of an informational statement is, "Bobby, you carried your addition from the one's column to the ten's column just as I had shown you. Good job!" Informational verbal statements describe specific behaviors. An example of an affirmative verbal statement is, "That was the correct answer." Affirmative verbal statements are more general in nature. However, both can be effective social reinforcers.

4. Generalized reinforcers are a type of conditioned reinforcer that does not rely on any sort of deprivation to be effective. Tokens, such as points in a motivation system, and money are two examples of generalized reinforcers. They allow the individual access to a wide array of other primary or secondary reinforcers. They also serve as an interim reinforcer to many others that are available at a later time. Those reinforcers that are available at a later time are called "back-up reinforcers." A benefit of using generalized reinforcers is that they can maintain behavior over extended time periods and are less likely to lead to satiation.

▶ Shaping

Behavioral shaping is defined as the differential reinforcement of successive approximations to a desired behavior (Alberto & Troutmann, 1990). In other words, shaping enhances the gradual development of a new behavior by continually reinforcing small improvements or steps toward the target behavior or goal. Rather than expecting a new behavior to occur exactly the way you taught it, you reinforce any behavior that closely resembles the goal. Now let's look specifically at what is meant by differential reinforcement and successive approximations.

Differential reinforcement means that one behavior is reinforced while another behavior that was previously displayed is not. Both of these behaviors come from the same response class, which means they are similar or related behaviors.

Figure 2 illustrates a shaping process and how differential reinforcement is the key principle in use. The example is a shaping process that a teacher might use with a student who has a problem sitting up straight at his desk. This student frequently slouches down low in his seat. The step-by-step training progression starts with reinforcing the behavior of having the student's behind touching the desk chair. When that behavior is established, having the student move his behind closer to the back of the desk chair is reinforced, and his behind touching the chair is not reinforced. Next, having the student's lower back touching the back of the desk chair is reinforced and the two previous behaviors are not reinforced. The shaping process continues until the final goal of sitting upright in the desk chair is met.

A successive approximation to a desired behavior is any intermediate behavior that is either part of the goal behavior or a combination of successive steps leading to the goal behavior. For example, successive approximations to the desired behavior of a student wearing his glasses all day at school might be first picking up the glasses, putting them on, wearing them for one class period, etc., until the student reaches his goal.

Some advantages of behavioral shaping include:

1. It is a positive procedure because reinforcement is delivered consistently upon the occurrence of successive approximations to the goal. The other behaviors that are displayed are not reinforced.

2. Shaping can be used to teach new behaviors. Because shaping is a gradual process, the end goal or desired behavior is always in sight. Shaping can be used with other behavior-building procedures.

Some disadvantages of shaping include:

1. Shaping is a time-consuming process. Extended training with the student may be necessary before the final goal is met.

2. Progress in this process is not always an easy movement from one behavior to the next with uninterrupted flow. The student's behavior may become erratic, with considerable time lapses between movement. Certain steps may need to be further dissected into smaller steps so that smaller approximations can be mastered. This requires considerable monitoring to detect subtle indications that the next step in the sequence has been performed.

3. Because monitoring is time-consuming, it sometimes does not occur. This can make the whole shaping procedure ineffective and inefficient.

There are some guidelines that can be useful in making a behavioral shaping program effective and efficient:

1. Select the goal behavior. It is important to define the goal very specifically. The more behaviorally specific you can be, the greater the likelihood of success.

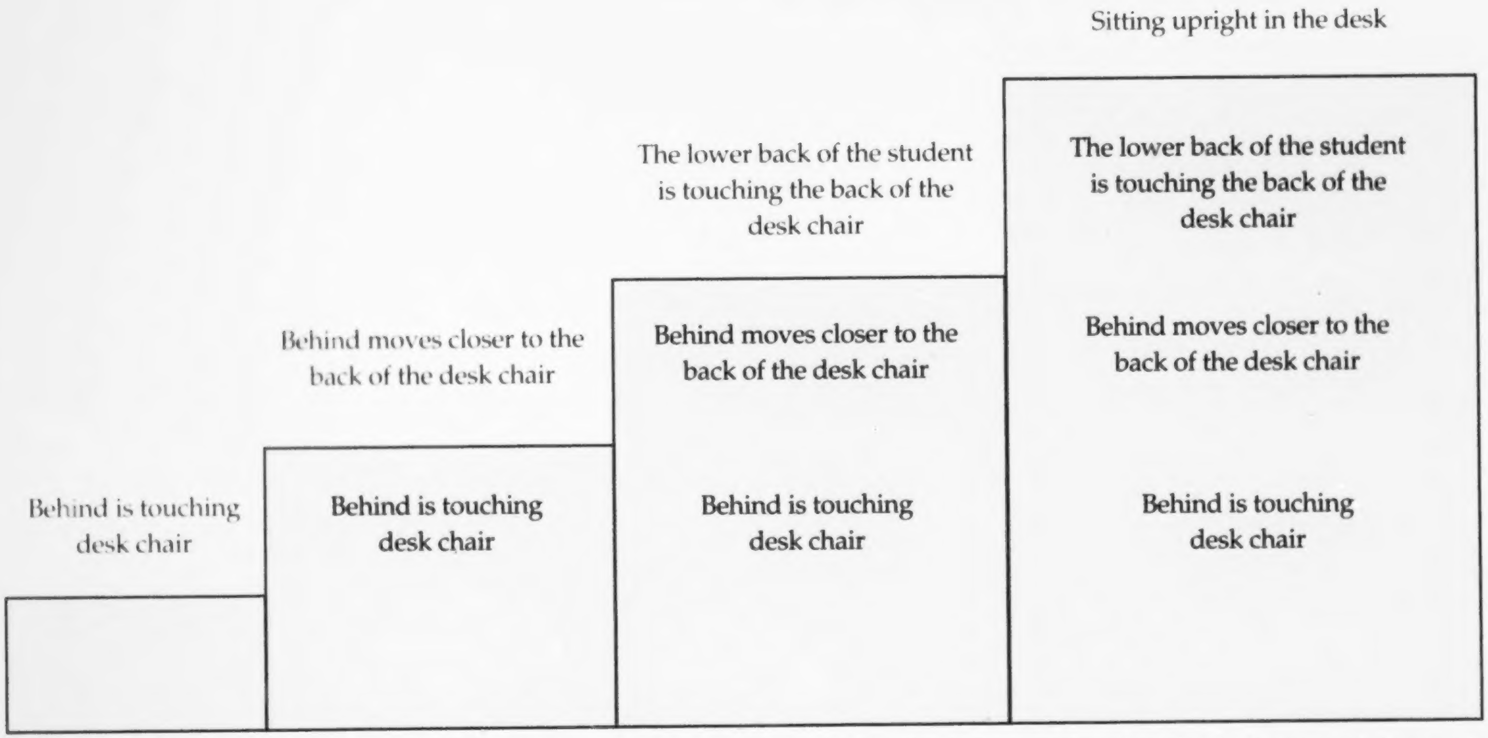
2. Decide the criteria for success. This should be specified so you can tell when the goal has been met. Some common criteria for success may include rate of behavior, frequency of behavior, percentage, magnitude, and duration.

3. Conduct a behavioral analysis of the goal behavior. Analyze each step in sequence that will have the end result of criterion performance of the goal.

Figure 2

Shaping Process

Differential reinforcement in action



Behind is touching desk chair

Behind moves closer to the back of the desk chair

Behind is touching desk chair

The lower back of the student is touching the back of the desk chair

Behind moves closer to the back of the desk chair

Behind is touching desk chair

Sitting upright in the desk

The lower back of the student is touching the back of the desk chair

Behind moves closer to the back of the desk chair

Behind is touching desk chair

Steps in differentially reinforcing sitting upright; shaded portion includes behaviors no longer reinforced.

4. Identify the first behavior to reinforce. The behavior should already occur at some minimal level. The behavior should be a member of the same response class of the goal behavior. By using these guidelines, you can begin reinforcing immediately and without waiting for a new behavior to occur spontaneously. The first behavior reinforced already has a direct link to the goal behavior, which moves the child closer to goal attainment.

5. Proceed in gradual steps. This is critical for success. The student's approximation of the goal dictates how quickly the goal is attained. Do not move ahead until a step is achieved or learned by the student.

6. Continue reinforcement when a desired behavior is achieved. If reinforcement is not continued, the behavior will be lost and the student's behavior will regress. Reinforce the behavior until the goal criterion is met and a schedule of reinforcement is established.

7. When at all possible, link the behavior to other behaviors that will help the student be more productive at school and in other areas of his or her life.

▶ Fading

Fading refers to the gradual removal of antecedent prompts and cues so that naturally occurring events prompt the desired behavior. Fading is an important concept when artificial contingencies such as point systems are used with students in the classroom.

Here is an example of how fading is used in the classroom: One of your students loses a privilege each time she doesn't pay attention. As a prompt to pay attention, you start using a physical gesture such as looking directly at the student and then putting your finger to your eyes. The next step will be having the student pay attention without any prompting.

▶ Negative reinforcement

Negative reinforcement is another principle used to increase behavior. People often mistakenly think of negative reinforcement as a punishment procedure. This is not accurate because punishment procedures decrease behavior and negative reinforcement increases behavior. The term "negative" is used because the procedure removes or reduces, rather than creates or adds an event. Negative reinforcement is the removal or the reduction of an ongoing event contingent upon a response, thus increasing the likelihood that the behavior will occur again under similar situations. The event that is removed is called the "negative reinforcer." Everyday examples of negative reinforcement include closing a window on a cold day or adjusting the flow of hot water in the shower. Because cold air coming through a window made you shiver in the past, or because water that was too hot in the shower burned you, you remove these events to avoid the negative effect. Refer to Figure 1 for a review of this concept.

As an educator, your behavior is an important factor with regards to negative reinforcement. If you lose your teaching focus with students when they make a mistake, you may add to the potential of them not telling the truth about that situation. Yelling or making judgmental statements to a student who isn't following instructions and then asking about the situation may be unproductive. The student may lie in order to avoid or reduce the negative stimulus of the yelling or judgmental terms. In this situation, the student has nothing to lose by lying; if the student tells the truth, he or she will receive a consequence for what happened. On the other hand, if the student lies and you believe it, the student successfully avoids a consequence. The student is actually reinforced for lying.

There are two contingencies related to negative reinforcement. They are escape/escape and avoidance/avoidance (Cooper, Heron, & Heward, 1987).

Escape/escape stops an existing event. A teacher might be faced with a situation in which two students in class are loudly calling one another names, and this continues for a few minutes. The teacher might reprimand the students and tell them to stop the bickering. The students stop the bickering momentarily. The teacher now has been negatively reinforced for using reprimands because it stopped the bickering.

Avoidance/avoidance occurs when a person's behavior avoids rather than terminates an event. A student might follow the teacher's instructions to avoid being sent to the office, or a student might sit in the back of the bus to avoid being teased by the other children on the bus. In each case, the student is escaping a negative stimulus.

▶ Positive punishment

To most people, the term punishment refers to the application of physical or psychological pain following the performance of a behavior. Generally, a person would think that a child who was spanked after running into the street had been punished for that behavior. However, the definition of punishment, as a principle of behavior, is the application of an aversive stimulus (following a behavior) that decreases the likelihood that a behavior will occur again. If the child does not run into the street again, then the spanking could be called punishment. However, if the spanking does not decrease the behavior, then it would not be considered punishment. Refer to Figure 1 for a review of the concept.

There are unconditioned and conditioned aversive stimuli. A stimulus that has not been previously experienced is an unconditioned aversive stimulus. For example: A loud blast or tone is sometimes used as an unconditioned stimulus to reduce the frequency of obscene phone calls. The caller has not been "conditioned," therefore, the unpleasantness of the stimulus may make the caller hang up.

A conditioned aversive stimulus is an event that is initially perceived as neutral, but by repeated pairing with a unconditioned aversive stimulus becomes aversive in nature. An example is the word "No." It is not inherently aversive. However, continually pairing it with a loud, harsh voice tone can make "No" become aversive to students in a classroom.

Three things must happen in order for something to be defined as punishment:

1. A behavior must be displayed.
2. The behavior must be followed by an aversive stimulus.
3. That stimulus alone must decrease the probability that the behavior will occur in the future.

The Boys Town Education Model does not rely on or recommend the use of "positive punishment" because it has many negative side effects. These include:

1. Negative reinforcement of the punisher. Not only is the person delivering the punishment negatively reinforced because the behavior ceases, but the student-educator relationship that is so necessary to internalizing behavior changes, is damaged. The educator will be more likely to use the same procedure in the future instead of trying something less restrictive.

2. Emotional or aggressive behavior. The student may attack, escape, or become physically aggressive toward the punisher in an effort to stop the punishment.

3. Avoidance and escape. Avoidance of the punisher can take a literal sense when students avoid the actual punishment or the place they were punished. For example, a student who is punished for being late to class may not go to class. Avoidance and escape behaviors also can occur in a nonliteral sense. For example, a student might escape punishing environments by taking drugs and alcohol, or by "tuning out" (Cooper, Heron, & Heward, 1987).

4. Negative modeling. If you punish a child for a behavior, the child will most likely imitate the punishment. Modeling punitive forms of behavior may negate the positive effects of your teaching.

5. Unpredictability. Side effects of punishment may be difficult to predict prior to implementing a treatment strategy. Persons utilizing the aversive stimuli should be aware of these effects and have an alternate plan for handling the situation.

▶ Response cost/negative punishment

Response cost is a form of punishment in which a specific amount of reinforcement is lost as a result of an inappropriate behavior. As punishment, this decreases the probability that the behavior will occur again. A student losing part of his free time for not following your instructions or a student losing privileges because he did not complete his homework are examples of response cost. Refer to Figure 1 for a review of this concept.

There are three desirable aspects of using response cost. They are:

1. Similar to other forms of punishment, response cost usually produces a moderate-to-rapid decrease in behavior. Results of this procedure are apparent after a reasonable trial period, usually three to five days (Cooper, Heron, & Heward, 1987).
2. Response cost is a convenient procedure to use in the classroom. Many studies have shown a decrease in negative classroom behavior by using these procedures.

3. Response cost can be combined with other behavioral procedures in a comprehensive behavior-change program. In the Boys Town approach, the use of response cost is combined with the "fair pair" rule developed by White and Haring (1980). This rule suggests that the teacher reinforces one or more alternatives for every behavior targeted for reduction. It is critical to teach the prosocial alternative to any misbehavior and Boys Town's teaching techniques incorporate this concept. The combination of positive reinforcement and response cost helps to motivate the students to change their misbehaviors into more appropriate behaviors.

The same conditions that impact the effectiveness of positive reinforcement also impact response cost: immediacy, choice of the reinforcer to be taken away, and withholding the reinforcer when a negative behavior occurs. Teachers are responsible for taking these conditions into account as they maximize the effectiveness of consequences they use for each individual student.

▶ Extinction

Extinction is a procedure in which the reinforcement of a previously reinforced behavior is discontinued. Used in this way, extinction reduces behaviors that were previously maintained by positive and negative reinforcement and by naturally occurring sensory consequences.

Withholding reinforcers may easily be misused and may be seen as a student rights violation. Therefore, extinction should be used only after extensive consultation and only with administrative approval.

▶ Generalization

Generalization means that skills learned in one set of antecedent conditions subsequently are used under different antecedent conditions. For example, skills learned in a classroom can be generalized to other appropriate environments outside the classroom. This principle of behavior means that each skill does not have to be taught in each new environment where it could be used. Generalization can be promoted by having the students thoroughly practice each skill and by conducting the practice under conditions that simulate the student's real environments (e.g. home, other classrooms, sports practices, recreation areas.). You can effectively promote generalization by monitoring how children are behaving in a variety of situations. This feedback, whether it be first- or second-hand observations, can give you opportunities to reinforce your students for generalizing appropriate behavior to new settings.

▶ Discrimination

Discrimination means that changes in the antecedent conditions produce changes in behavior. In this sense, discrimination is the opposite of generalization. Discrimination means that a behavior is used only under certain circumstances but not under other, different circumstances. For example, if a student uses slang with his friends, but uses proper grammar when talking with a teacher, he has appropriately discriminated between those situations. Similarly, aggression that is appropriate in an athletic contest is not appropriate in the classroom.

Much of the teaching done by educators not only helps students learn new skills but also teaches them where and under what conditions certain behaviors are appropriate. Teaching youth behavioral discrimination is crucial. They must learn to notice the environmental cues that call for different sets of behavior.

Summary

The principles of behavior discussed in this chapter form the foundation of the Boys Town Education Model.

Being an effective teacher is a challenging job. However, learning and applying these principles of behaviors will help reduce problems in your classrooms and help students change some difficult behavior problems. By changing these maladaptive skills into prosocial behaviors, you are giving students a chance for success in their classrooms as well as success in their lives.

CHAPTER SIX

Teaching the curriculum skills

In order for members of a society to successfully coexist, they behave in certain, agreed upon ways. Those who cannot or do not "fit" within the range of expected behavioral patterns are viewed as deviant, irresponsible, or less intelligent than the "norm." Social skills allow us to pass as normal (Greenspan, 1979) and fit within the mainstream of society.

For many children, school can be the biggest challenge in their lives. Not only do they worry about academic success, but also about how well they make friends and get along with peers and teachers. Their ability to be a part of the school "culture" may overshadow most other aspects of school life.

Children with deficient social skills are more likely to experience difficulties in school and beyond. Children having difficulty with certain kinds of social behavior, especially paying attention, persevering, volunteering, and communicating with teachers, may be at risk for academic failure (Stephens, 1978) and peer acceptance problems (Schneider & Byrne, 1984). The link between poor social skills and other problems is clear. Gresham (1981) found that children with social skill deficits experienced a variety of problems, including aggressive and antisocial behavior, juvenile delinquency, learning problems and school failure, mental health disorders, and loneliness and despondency.

There is evidence that social and behavioral deficiencies that are not corrected in childhood frequently carry over into adulthood (Steinberg & Knitzer, 1992), and that without appropriate opportunities to learn functional social skills, children fail to correct the deficiencies on their own (Stephens, 1978).

Meadows, Neel, Parker, and Timo (1991) report that adults who had social skill deficits as children suffered long-term effects ranging from higher rates of suicide to unsuccessful employment histories. Problems such as arguing with one's supervisor and being unable to work with others reflect poor social skill acquisition and use.

The teaching of social skills, then, becomes imperative if we truly are committed to helping students achieve success in school and beyond. Teachers are a powerful influence on children, at times serving as their sole role models of acceptable social behavior. Historically, teachers have not engaged in purposeful teaching of social skills, but it has often existed as a "hidden curriculum." They set standards and held students accountable for meeting them. Without a certain number of rules and expectations, classrooms couldn't run successfully. Without behavioral guidelines, group teaching would be impossible.

Unfortunately, many of our rules, guidelines, and expectations serve to control the behavior of students instead of empowering them to make responsible decisions. Although we need a certain number of compliance-based rules or skills to ensure smooth classroom operation, we can achieve the greatest good by helping students learn to make responsible choices about their own behavior. Doing so provides them with tools for meeting future challenges, in addition to helping them succeed in school today.

When a student is in the early stages of learning skills, a considerable amount of compliance is required in order for him or her to understand and benefit from your teaching. The student needs the "building blocks" of the basic skills to develop the higher-level skills that lead to self-reliance and self-efficacy. Once students begin to experience success using the basic skills you've taught, their beliefs about their capabilities to use those skills start to change. These beliefs or judgments about our abilities to influence the events that impact our lives are critical to our successes — more so than our actual skill levels (Mager, 1992). By giving students the basic tools of social interaction, we can shape success experiences and help them utilize learned skills to broaden and deepen their social skill repertoire.

▶ The Social Skills Curriculum

As described in Chapter 1, the Boys Town Education Model is made up of four components: Social Skills, Teaching Interactions, Motivation Systems, and Administrative Intervention. The Social Skills component tells us what to teach, while the Teaching Interactions and Administrative Intervention provide the vehicle for teaching.

Combs and Slaby (1977) have defined a social skill as "the ability to interact with others... in ways that are socially accepted or valued and at the same time are personally beneficial or beneficial primarily to others." In other words, a social skill is something that helps a person get along with others in ways that match the values of the society and benefits that person or others. The definition also suggests that social skills are not a constant set of behaviors, but vary according to the context or situation in which they are to be used.

Using social skills in appropriate ways, across a variety of contexts, is a very complex process. It involves more than knowing a set of behaviors; rather it is a rapid chain of decisions based on reading cues and determining responses in the context of interpersonal interactions.

Sixteen skills comprise the Boys Town Social Skills Curriculum. They encompass four main areas: Adult Relations, Peer Relations, School Rules, and Classroom Behaviors. The 16 skills are divided into two categories, **Basic** and **Advanced**.

Basic skills

1. Following instructions
2. Accepting criticism or a consequence
3. Accepting "No" for an answer
4. Greeting others
5. Getting the teacher's attention
6. Making a request
7. Disagreeing appropriately

Advanced skills

8. Giving criticism
9. Resisting peer pressure
10. Making an apology
11. Talking with others
12. Giving compliments
13. Accepting compliments
14. Volunteering
15. Reporting other youths' behavior
16. Introducing yourself

The seven basic skills have been designated as "basic" because of their level of complexity and because they come into play so frequently during the course of any given day. Since a large percentage of our daily social interactions are covered by these basic skills, they often are referred to as critical skills. Mastering these seven skills, along with "Talking with others," could significantly impact a student's ability to succeed in school. If students can adequately perform in these areas, they'll not only avoid considerable conflict with adults and peers, but also will have some prosocial skills that will enable them to make and keep friends. This does not mean that other skills are less important than the seven basic ones, only that the basic skills might be used more often. Certainly, students need to know how to apologize and how to introduce themselves to others, but they probably will face more situations in which they will need to know how to greet others or accept criticism.

Each skill has been divided into discrete and observable steps. All 16 skills are described in this chapter. (The Appendix, pages 145 - 146, lists 12 social skills used by preschool, elementary, and special education teachers in their classrooms.) By limiting the number of steps in each skill and making sure that each step is measurable and observable, students will clearly understand what is expected of them and will be more successful using the skills. Teachers should teach skills consistently (i.e. using the same skill steps each time) in order to make student learning easier and to avoid confusion. This becomes especially important when students have more than one teacher instructing them in the Social Skills Curriculum.

Teaching the Curriculum Skills

Basic skills

Skill 1

Following instructions

1. Look at the person.
2. Say "Okay."
3. Do what you've been asked right away.
4. Check back.

Skill 2

Accepting criticism or a consequence

1. Look at the person.
2. Say "Okay."
3. Don't argue.

Skill 3

Accepting "No" for an answer

1. Look at the person.
2. Say "Okay."
3. Stay calm.
4. If you disagree, ask later.

Skill 4

Greeting others

1. Look at the person.
2. Use a pleasant voice.
3. Say "Hi" or "Hello."

Skill 5

Getting the teacher's attention

1. Look at the teacher.
2. Raise your hand. Stay calm.
3. Wait until the teacher says your name.
4. Ask your question.

Skill 6

Making a request

1. Look at the person.
2. Use a clear, pleasant voice.
3. Explain exactly what you are asking for. Say "please."
4. If the answer is "Yes," say "Thank you."
5. If not, remember to accept "No" for an answer.

Skill 7

Disagreeing appropriately

1. Look at the person.
2. Use a pleasant voice.
3. Say "I understand how you feel."
4. Tell why you feel differently.
5. Give a reason.
6. Listen to the other person.

Advanced skills

Skill 8

Giving criticism

1. Look at the person.
2. Stay calm. Use a pleasant voice.
3. Say something positive or "I understand."
4. Describe exactly what you are criticizing.
5. Tell why this is a problem.
6. Listen to the person. Be polite.

Skill 9

Resisting peer pressure

1. Look at the person.
2. Use a calm voice.
3. Say clearly that you do not want to participate.
4. Suggest something else to do.
5. If necessary, continue to say "No."
6. Leave the situation.

Skill 10

Making an apology

1. Look at the person.
2. Use a serious, sincere voice.
3. Say "I'm sorry for... " or "I want to apologize for...."
4. Don't make excuses.
5. Explain how you plan to do better in the future.
6. Say "Thanks for listening."

Skill 11

Talking with others

1. Look at the person.
2. Use a pleasant voice.
3. Ask questions.
4. Don't interrupt.

Skill 12

Giving compliments

1. Look at the person.
2. Smile.
3. Speak clearly and enthusiastically.
4. Tell the person exactly what you like.

Skill 13

Accepting compliments

1. Look at the person.
2. Use a pleasant voice.
3. Say "Thank you."
4. Don't look away, mumble, or deny the compliment.
5. Do not disagree with the compliment.

Skill 14

Volunteering

1. Look at the person.
2. Use a pleasant, enthusiastic voice.
3. Ask if you can help. Describe the activity or task you are offering to do.
4. Thank the person.
5. Check back when you have finished.

Skill 15

Reporting other youths' behavior

1. Look at the teacher or adult.
2. Use a calm voice. Ask to talk to him or her privately.
3. Describe the inappropriate behavior you are reporting.
4. Explain why you are making the report.
5. Answer any questions the adult has.
6. Thank the adult for listening.

Skill 16

Introducing yourself

1. Look at the person. Smile.
2. Use a pleasant voice.
3. Offer a greeting. Say "Hi, my name is...."
4. Shake the person's hand.
5. When you leave, say, "It was nice to meet you."

Remember that not all of the expected behaviors may be clearly spelled out in the steps of each skill. Some specific teaching regarding the quality of a student's voice, the manner in which he or she uses eye contact, and other "paraskill" behaviors may be necessary to enhance a student's success. In other words, when teaching a social skill to a student, you need to teach the individual steps that make up the skill and the various behaviors that make up each step. For example:

Following instructions

Step
Look at the person.

Behavior
Look directly at the person without glaring or making faces.

Step
Say "Okay."

Behavior
Answer right away. Speak clearly without sounding angry.

Step
Do the task immediately.

Behavior
Start doing the task within two or three seconds. Keep at the task until it's done. Ask for help if there are problems.

Step
Check back.

Behavior
Report what was done as soon as the task is completed. Correct anything that needs to be done again.

An excellent source for defining exact expectations for a variety of social skills is *Teaching Social Skills to Youth : A Curriculum for Child-Care Providers* (Dowd & Tierney, 1992). Many of the behavioral examples presented in this chapter were drawn from that text.

Although the Social Skills Curriculum consists of 16 skills, you can teach any skill by task-analyzing it and teaching it in a step-by-step manner. Start by deciding what you want the student to do. That is, begin with the end in mind. Once you know your end product, determine exactly what behaviors need to be included to get the desired result. Make sure each step is observable so you can tell whether the student is meeting your expectations. Include only critical steps, as you don't want the skill to be so long that neither you nor the student can remember all the components. For example, you may come up with the following steps for a skill you call "How to Stay On Task":

1. Begin working as soon as assignment is given.

2. Continue working until assignment is completed or time runs out.

3. Get the teacher's attention appropriately if you need help or complete your work.

Remember that the level of skill performance will vary among students, depending upon their skill levels and target areas. You might expect a higher skilled student to respond to criticism by following the skill steps exactly, but your tolerances for a student who is just beginning the program would most likely be quite a bit different. For example, you may accept a new student's response of rolling his eyes and looking away while hearing criticism because when he first came to your classroom, he argued loudly and turned away from you. His new behaviors indicate considerable improvement and progress. Even though the behavior does not match your "ultimate" expectations, you can continue to shape the student's behavior by individualizing your teaching.

▶ Introducing the Social Skills Curriculum

A social skills program can be taught like any other curriculum. Each skill should be taught individually at a neutral time (see Chapter 10, "Preventive Teaching") to help students experience success and gain fluency with the skills. At the same time, your students will be engaged in "on-the-job" training since you'll be addressing behaviors as they occur.

Prioritize your skills instruction by assessing the needs of your students. Skills that must be used frequently or are in need of improvement will probably be among the first ones you'll focus on. Keep in mind that the value of any social skill may vary according to who is assessing its importance. Your level of interest in fostering development of certain social skills may be much higher than that of your students. Whereas you may view a particular skill as central to effective classroom operation (for example, "How to Accept 'No'"), your students may have a different point of view. They may feel their status among their peers is endangered by performing the skill steps you've outlined. So, the manner in which you select and teach social skills should take the child's perspective into consideration, along with your own, for greatest impact and effectiveness (Dowd & Tierney, 1992).

Following your needs assessment, you'll teach the social skills much like you would any other content area. To be effective, you'll teach and practice the skills, then assess, redirect, and reinforce student efforts. By setting aside a regular block of time to preteach and practice skills, you'll communicate to students that learning social skills is as important as any other subject in school.

Equally critical to the success of the program is your consistent follow-up with each student. Immediate and contingent reinforcement and Corrective Teaching emphasize the importance of the Social Skills Curriculum and take advantage of the "teachable moment." Addressing behavior as it occurs enhances the learning environment by making the learning relevant and immediate.

Remember that praise should occur four times as often as Corrective Teaching for change to take place most quickly. Noticing positive behaviors not only sends the message that you are aware of the "good" things your students do, but also helps you build and maintain relationships with each student.

When teaching social skills, **your** behavior is extremely important. Whether praising appropriate behavior or effort, or teaching alternatives to inappropriate behavior, your demeanor and disposition should be supportive and calm. Looking at the student, using the student's name, maintaining a pleasant or neutral voice tone and facial expression, placing yourself on the student's physical plane (i.e. both sitting or both standing), and keeping a comfortable distance between you and the student all contribute to the quality of the interaction. Your behavior sets the tone of the interaction and greatly impacts the outcome of your attempts to teach social skills. (See Chapter 9, "Effective Praise," for additional discussion.)

Finally, use the teaching techniques described in Chapters 8 through 12 to effectively motivate behavioral change. The sequences are designed to facilitate social skills learning by maintaining a teaching focus. Without each of the specific components, your interactions could become vague, irrelevant, or punitive. If you remember that the emphasis is on teaching, you are more likely to have a positive impact on your students' behavior. Clear, consistent social skills teaching, like clear and consistent academic teaching, can only increase the likelihood that your students will learn new behaviors.

▶ Summary

The 16 skills in the Boys Town Education Model form the basic curriculum for teaching social behavior. Skills are made up of a number of observable steps and are categorized as Basic or Advanced. Any behavior can be broken down into components and taught in a systematic manner to meet each student's needs. Skills should be taught preventively so that students know what a teacher's expectations are, and in response to behaviors as they occur. Teaching sequences and strategies will be presented in later chapters.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Observing and describing behavior

The foundation of effective teaching is the ability to observe and describe behavior. This skill helps you determine what effect you have on your students and how their behavior affects you. It also helps you identify what skills to teach students and what behaviors make up each skill.

The goal of observing and describing behavior is to accurately verbalize what is happening in a given situation. In fact, the best descriptions are those that mirror a person's behavior so clearly that the behavior could be repeated or reenacted by someone who hadn't observed the behavior firsthand.

Changing the inappropriate behaviors of students and teaching new, appropriate behaviors is made easier by the ability to observe and describe behavior.

▶ Observing behavior

The first step in observing and describing any behavior is to watch and listen carefully. Determine who was involved in the situation and attend specifically to the following areas:

What the person is doing. Look at both large and small body movements, such as running, walking, kicking, throwing, hand gestures, and body posture.

Facial expressions help you determine a student's feelings. Look for expressions — smiles, scowls, grimaces, stares, or rolling of the eyes or eye contact.

What the person is saying. Listen carefully to specific words and how they are said. Tone of voice and inflection can sometimes be better indicators of what a youth is feeling than the words that are used. Also notice giggles, groans, moans, or sighs.

Frequency, intensity, and duration of the behavior. These characteristics often determine whether a behavior is appropriate or inappropriate. Monitor whether the behavior occurs too frequently or not frequently enough, whether it escalates in intensity, and whether it lasts too long or not long enough.

When and where the behavior occurs. What events and circumstances happen before the event takes place? What time of day does it occur and where does it take place? For example, laughing with a friend in the hallway may be appropriate; laughing with a friend during study hall may be inappropriate.

The absence of behavior. Was there a behavior that should have occurred but did not? For example, did the student fail to look at another person during conversation, or not answer a question when asked, or fail to raise his hand before speaking in class?

Describing behavior

After closely observing behaviors, begin forming a mental picture of what occurred — almost like an instant replay of the behavior. Your goal is to describe what happened as accurately as possible. Concentrate solely on what behaviors occurred. An accurate picture of the situation is needed before any successful intervention is attempted. Don't make any judgments on a student's intentions or motives.

Make your descriptions:

1. **Specific**
2. **Behavioral**
3. **Objective**

Specific — Avoid using adjectives that are general or vague. You may feel a student has a "bad attitude," but what behaviors did the student engage in that gave you this impression? Similarly, a "good job," may indicate general satisfaction, but what specifically was good about it? The goal of being specific is to give students messages that are easily understood and that convey exactly what you mean. A "good job" may be more accurately described as using complete sentences on an essay test, completing a difficult classroom assignment on time, or putting all supplies where they belong without being prompted. The more specific you can be, the more the student is likely to understand, thereby having the opportunity to repeat positive behavior or change negative behavior.

One way to describe behavior accurately is to concentrate on using action verbs instead of adjectives. For example, terms like "You ran," "You growled," or "You yelled" describe actions and are easy to understand. They are not as open to interpretation as descriptions that rely solely on adjectives, e.g. good, bad, unfriendly, antisocial, etc.

Behavioral — Break behaviors down into specific components. For example, being "antisocial" could be described as not speaking when spoken to, avoiding participation in study groups with other students, showing disinterest in extracurricular events, and so on. In this way, the student has three specific areas where he or she could learn new social skills.

Objective — Judgmental terms can harm a relationship by damaging a student's self-esteem or triggering an emotional reaction. Terms like "stupid," "bad," and "terrible" should be avoided. Also, keep any negative emotions under control. Concentrate on using a calm, matter-of-fact approach when describing behavior. Stay objective and students will be more likely to view you as concerned, pleasant, and fair. For example, instead of saying, "You were disrespectful to me," you could say, "When I asked you for your book, you scowled and gestured with your finger."

When describing verbal behavior, you may sometimes need to repeat exactly what a student says (within ethical and moral limits, of course). If you cannot offer an exact quote, begin your description with "You said something like...." Carefully and specifically describing verbal behavior helps you remain objective and concentrate on observable events and behaviors.

When to observe and describe behavior

Naturally, observing and describing behavior is an ongoing process whenever you are working with your students. However, there are times when you will want to "zero in" on certain behaviors. These times include:

When the student's behavior is inappropriate. This could include any form of misbehavior or problem behavior, such as not following an instruction, arguing, or complaining.

When the student's behavior is particularly appropriate. This is a special time to "catch 'em being good" — to focus on behavior that you want to occur again. Many of us usually are so locked in to dealing only with problem behaviors that we often neglect to find something to praise and then tell the student about it. Describing what your students are doing correctly helps develop relationships and reinforce positive behavior.

When you want to teach a new skill. Describing new behaviors helps students learn quicker and progress through academic and social curricula more efficiently. Accurately describing what was done, both correctly and incorrectly, gives the student feedback on his or her performance that is valuable in internalizing the skill you are teaching.

The ability to observe and describe behavior is a valuable skill. Accurate, objective descriptions help establish expectations and ensure successful and comfortable learning experiences for the student.

Integrating behavioral descriptions and skill labels

The Teaching Interaction — a nine-step method used at Boys Town to teach skills to students — will be explained in detail in

Chapter 11. For now, it is important to present an explanation of how observing and describing behaviors fits into this teaching method. Clearly describing behavior and labeling skills help you teach your students a great deal in a short time. Clear, behavioral descriptions and skill labels are integrated into most of the components of Teaching Interactions.

An example of using skill labels and behavioral descriptions in the first four steps of a Teaching Interaction follows. Learning how to specifically describe behavior and label skills while using these steps will provide clear, focused, and nonjudgmental teaching to your students. Explanations for each step also are provided.

Example

Situation: Chris, a new student, is working on the computer during study hour. His teacher asks Chris to open the window to let some fresh air into the classroom. Chris sighs, doesn't look at the teacher, but gets up and walks to the window. The use of the first four components might sound something like this:

Initial praise or empathy

Teacher: *"Chris, you did a good job of getting right up to open the window. I know it's hard to follow instructions sometimes, especially when you're working on the computer."*

Explanation: Specific, descriptive praise is given for "getting right up...." The general skill is identified in the context of the empathy statement, "I know it's hard to follow instructions...." Whenever possible, the initial praise should relate to behaviors that are part of the skill being praised or taught.

Description of the inappropriate behavior

Teacher: *"But just now when I gave you that instruction, you sighed and you didn't look at me or say anything to let me know you heard or that you would help out."*

Explanation: Note that the general skill category of "Following Instructions" is repeated and the observed inappropriate behavior is described. Also, note that the teacher avoids vague and judgmental descriptions such as, "You weren't very cooperative..." or "You didn't seem too happy when I asked you to...."

Description of the appropriate behavior

Teacher: *"Chris, let's talk about following instructions. Whenever anyone gives you an instruction, whether it's a teacher, your parents, or your employer, there are several things you should do.*

You need to look at the person and answer him or her by saying 'Okay' or 'Sure' to let the person know you're listening and will follow through. Be sure to ask questions if you don't understand. Do the task and then check back with the person when it's completed."

Explanation: The teacher helps the youth generalize the skill to other situations by explaining the antecedent condition, "Whenever anyone gives you an instruction...." Then, the teacher provides a step-by-step, behavioral description to help the student learn the skill. During an actual interaction, the teacher would pause frequently to ask the student if he or she understands, has any questions, etc.

▶ Summary

Educators can be pleasant and effective by following the guidelines for describing behavior (carefully observing antecedents, behavior, and consequences); labeling skills and describing the behaviors related to them; and skillfully integrating these techniques into the components of all teaching techniques: Preventive Teaching, Effective Praise, and the Teaching Interaction.

Rationales

Many students don't understand the relationship between their behaviors and the consequences or outcomes of their behaviors. That is why supplying rationales for students plays such an important part in the teaching you do.

A rationale, by definition, is a fundamental reason. We use rationales in many ways everyday to convince ourselves or others of the benefits or drawbacks of maintaining or changing a behavior. For example, the rationale for practicing a sport is that you probably will do better in a game. The rationale for being on time for work is that your employer may take that into consideration when deciding whether to give you a raise. The rationale for dieting is that you may lose weight.

The Boys Town Education Model uses rationales to explain to students how a behavior is linked to its results. In a Teaching Interaction, a rationale is a statement that describes the possible benefits or negative consequences a student might receive for engaging in a certain behavior. It also may point out the effect the behavior could have on others. For example, you might tell a student that the reason she should study hard is to improve her grades. A student who is calling other children names might be told that no one will want to play with him if the name-calling continues. Or, you might tell a youngster he should follow instructions so he can save time, and have more free time to do fun things.

To maximize the effect rationales can have on behavior, they should generally focus on the benefits of behaving appropriately or refraining from inappropriate behavior. By identifying students' goals and tailoring rationales to match these goals, you can have a powerful impact on student behavior. For example, if a student is motivated to improve her grades, a teacher may provide the rationale that accepting (and implementing) feedback about assignments may help her master the content and receive higher grades on tests or future assignments. For the student whose present goal is to drop out of school as soon as possible, however, such a rationale wouldn't be meaningful. Rather, rationales for staying in school that are related to getting a job or daily living issues would be more appropriate.

Rationales that emphasize negative consequences are occasionally necessary. For example, pointing out the negative outcomes associated with fighting may be the most meaningful and direct tie to the behavior. Frequent use, however, could make the rationales begin to sound like warnings or threats. Positive rationales usually work better to encourage appropriate behavior.

▶ Importance of rationales

Many children do not fully understand the relationship between their behavior and subsequent events. For example, D.S. Eitzen (1974) conducted a survey of the attitudes of predelinquent and delinquent adolescents and found that they didn't understand that their behavior determines what happens to them. Instead, they often see themselves as "victims of fate," or blame other people for their problems (Jones & Jones, 1990). To illustrate, a student who gets caught cheating on a test and consequently suffers a failing grade may blame the teacher for catching him or her rather than seeing the consequence as a logical outcome of the behavior. The relationships between events must be carefully taught. By using rationales, you can help students understand the link between their behavior and the various consequences that may result (Downs, Black, & Kutsick, 1985) and shift the locus of behavior control from outside forces to the student.

▶ Types of rationales

Rationales fall into three main categories: benefits to the students, negative outcomes, and concern for or the effect on others. In general, rationales that focus on benefits or positive outcomes are the most meaningful to students, so they should be used more frequently than others. Certain situations, however, may dictate the use of a negative outcome rationale, as was discussed earlier in this chapter. Ultimately, your goal for all students is to teach them to consider the implications of their behavior on others. As such, you need to work toward incorporating rationales that focus on concern for others. At the same time, you must understand that this type of rationale initially may have little or no impact on a student.

A **benefits** rationale answers the questions of "What's in it for me?" or "How can it help me?" These may reflect the benefits or positive outcomes that might logically occur when a student engages in appropriate behavior or avoids engaging in inappropriate behavior. For example, a benefit statement may be, "When you can get a teacher's attention appropriately, you'll be more likely to get the help you need quickly and can then finish your work faster." A rationale for avoiding inappropriate behavior might sound like, "When you don't tease others, they're more likely to want to be around you and include you in games or activities." Both types of rationales point out a potential gain or benefit to the student. Benefits rationales, as mentioned earlier, tend to be the most powerful or meaningful to children. This is especially true for students who are less developmentally mature or who are new to a social skills program.

A **negative consequences** rationale, on the other hand, states the potential negative outcomes associated with engaging in inappropriate behavior. "How can I be hurt?" or "What price might I have to pay?" are questions that are answered by a negative consequences rationale. Examples include: "When you don't turn assignments in, you get further behind, your grade drops, and you could even fail the class," or "If you argue when you're corrected, you may not get the help you need and may repeat the same mistakes," or "If you don't smile and return someone's greeting, the person may think you're unfriendly or rude, and may begin to avoid you instead of trying to be your friend." Although negative consequences are sometimes the most logical ones to point out, frequent use may be interpreted as verbal warnings or threats. This type of rationale, therefore, should be used selectively.

A **concern-for-others** rationale states the effects a youth's behavior may have on other people. In addition to teaching care and respect for those who could be affected by the student's actions, this type of rationale incorporates the notion of consideration for the rights and property of others. Examples include: "If you call out to get a teacher's attention, you could disturb others who are trying to complete their assignments," and "When you tease other students, they may take you seriously and their feelings could be hurt." As mentioned earlier, concern-for-others rationales may not be effective at first. Many students, because of age, developmental level, or personal needs, are unable to consider the rights, feelings, or needs of others. Therefore, a gradual introduction of this type of rationale into the teaching process, especially as the child is demonstrating behavioral gains, may be the most effective approach.

▶ Benefits of rationales

Although the most important reason for using rationales may be that they help teach the relationships between behaviors and resulting consequences, there are other benefits.

Using rationales also helps adults build positive relationships with children. Pikas (1961) and Willner, Braukmann, Kirigin, Fixsen, Phillips, and Wolf (1977) found that youth prefer adults who give rationales and explanations with their disciplinary requests. For example, the statement, "You can't watch television right now because your homework is not finished," contains a rationale; a youngster would prefer it over, "You can't watch television right now."

Rationales also can help with compliance. Elder (1963) found that youngsters are more likely to comply with their parents' requests if the parents provide explanations for their rules and requests. For example, a parent might say, "If you save your money from your paper route, then together we can buy you a new bike." This statement contains a rationale implying that the youngster cannot have a new bicycle now and why he or she should save money. Elder also found that when parents provided rationales for rules and requests, their children were more likely to be more confident in their own ideas and opinions. This confidence, along with the youngsters' understanding of the relationship between their behavior and the consequences, can help youth make better decisions.

Because rationales help youth understand the relationship between their behavior and the subsequent consequences, your students can gain insight about the importance of learning new skills to replace old behaviors. As a result, children become less dependent on external rewards and reinforcement to motivate behavior change because they can see how their behavior determines what happens to them.

With regard to Teaching Interactions, Willner et al. (1977) and Braukmann, Ramp, Braukmann, Willner, and Wolf (1983) found that youngsters prefer Teaching Interactions in which adults provide explanations as they teach alternative, more appropriate skills. They found that when adults use rationales, youth are more likely to view them as fair and like them. Thus, given the importance of school climate and teacher-student relationships in improving student behavior and academic performance, using rationales is critical to effective teaching.

▶ Components of rationales

Effective rationales are characterized by several elements:

1. They point out natural or logical consequences. Rationales should point out consequences that naturally or logically occur as a result of a behavior. Natural consequences are those that tend to occur without human intervention, or those that are not within the youth's direct control. For example, "If you run down the sidewalk on a rainy day, you could slip and hurt yourself," or "If you tip back in your chair, you may fall." Logical consequences, on the other hand, are linked to behavior but are determined more by a student's actions or others interacting with the student. For example, "When you greet someone with a smile and say 'Hello,' the person is more likely to want to spend time with you and be your friend," or "If you prepare for a test by studying over a period of time, instead of studying only the night before, you'll probably get a higher grade."

2. They are personal to the youth. Rationales need to be geared to the individual interests of each student. This means carefully observing and talking with students to determine their interests, favorite activities, and likes or dislikes. Then, rationales can be specially tailored to each student. For example, if an eighth-grade student enjoys playing basketball and hopes to play on the high school team someday, his or her teachers can formulate rationales that help the student understand how following instructions or accepting criticism is beneficial. This may include taking criticism from the coach, accepting a referee's decision, or listening to the coach's instructions during practice. Similarly, for a youth whose motivation to graduate is low, rationales that stress the importance of paying attention in shop or computer class to learn skills that will help get him or her a job after leaving school may be far more effective than talking about higher education.

3. They are specific and brief. Usually, one good rationale is enough to accomplish the purposes of a Teaching Interaction or Effective Praise Interaction. You should be brief and to the point when providing a rationale, and avoid trying to convince the student with numerous reasons. Long explanations may confuse a student; you're more likely to keep a youth's attention with a brief, specific rationale. Even if the tone of the rationale is positive, a lengthy explanation will be perceived as lecturing and punishing.

4. They are believable and short-term. Rationales are more effective when immediate, rather than long-term, consequences are emphasized. For example, an effective rationale for following instructions without arguing might be, "You will have more free time if you quickly follow instructions instead of wasting time arguing." Pointing out this short-term, believable consequence is generally preferable to providing a remote consequence such as, "When you have a job, you will be more likely to get a promotion and a raise if you can follow instructions."

Rationales also must be believable, which means they must be age-appropriate and personalized. For example, you might tell a nine-year-old who enjoys recess, "Putting your things away when I tell you, instead of waiting for the bell to ring, means you will get to have all of recess time to play." But for a college-bound 17-year-old, a more pertinent rationale may be, "If you study hard and do well on your college entrance exams, you might earn a scholarship, which will make paying for college a lot easier."

5. They are developmentally appropriate. Rationales that describe short-term, believable consequences are generally the most meaningful for youngsters who are new to a social skills program, or who are less developmentally mature. However, as a youth matures and begins to internalize the gains he or she has made, it also is important to use rationales that point out long-term consequences and include statements of concern for others.

Long-term rationales point out more general consequences related to a youngster's behavior — consequences that will occur at some point in the more distant future. It is important for youngsters to understand how their behavior may affect their employment, their ability to take care of themselves, and their capacity to develop and maintain relationships. For example, a long-term rationale that could be used when teaching a student how to accept criticism might deal with the youngster's ability in the future to get along with a spouse or to keep a job. Similarly, you need to provide rationales that point out how a student's behavior affects others. Such "other-oriented" rationales should focus on sensitivity and concern for others. Children need to understand that their behavior leaves an impression on other people, and that those impressions reflect on them and everyone in the school. For example, an other-oriented rationale for not getting into arguments at a shopping mall with kids from different schools would be, "The stores may ask all students to leave the mall because of the behavior of just a few kids." Rationales can point out how the behavior of each child affects others, and how it can benefit or harm the other students and the school's reputation.

When to use rationales

Rationales are used in each of the specific teaching situations described in Chapters 8-10. However, they can be used any time teaching occurs. Rationales enhance the teaching of social skills and make learning more relevant and meaningful to a youth by establishing a purpose or reason for the learning.

During the course of a day, there will be numerous informal occasions for you to provide rationales. Students may ask your opinion or you may offer advice or a point of view. Including rationales at every opportunity is extremely helpful.

Briefly, rationales are used in the following contexts:

1. When teaching skills. Rationales should be used in all phases of teaching. When introducing academic concepts or skills, use rationales to establish the relevance of the material to "real-life" situations or future or past learning. When students are told why specific information is being studied, they demonstrate greater understanding and satisfaction about why they should learn what they are asked to learn (Porter & Brophy, 1988). Similar effects may generalize to social skills learning.

When you're introducing a new skill during Preventive Teaching (Chapter 10), rationales help students understand why they should learn a skill not currently in their repertoire. Rationales that focus on both short- and long-term benefits and cover a broad spectrum of situations can be generated by you and the student(s).

Rationales help reinforce the use of appropriate skills. They provide reasons why students should continue to engage in positive behaviors and are important to use in Effective Praise Interactions (Chapter 9).

Rationales are extremely important when teaching correctively during a Teaching Interaction. Explaining why a student should change a particular behavior and focusing most often on the benefits of doing so will help the student realize the cause-effect relationship between the behavior and its outcomes. Understanding this relationship empowers students by helping them learn how to take control of their own behaviors.

2. Whenever disagreements occur between educators and students. Stating why you disagree gives students a chance to "buy into" or at least understand your point of view. Students also view you as more open-minded and fair. Providing a rationale also models appropriate or desired behavior to students.

3. During problem-solving situations. When you are helping students generate potential solutions to problems, providing rationales helps them evaluate their options. Rationales may help students make better decisions by considering the possible benefits or problems associated with each solution.

4. During daily conversations. Students often ask their teachers or other staff members for explanations or advice. Rationales help students understand the logic behind the explanations or advice.

Although you hope students will understand your rationales and find them meaningful, the goal of using rationales is not to get students to agree with your reasons. You want to students to understand the rationales, but they do not have to agree with your point of view.

Perhaps most importantly, teachers and others working with youth need to remember that rationales alone do not effectively change behavior. Consistently describing behavior and supplying consequences, coupled with good reasons for initiating or maintaining behavior change, will result in the most positive outcomes.

Summary

There are three main types of rationales: benefits to students, negative outcomes, and concern for others. You decide which type is best for each student by considering such variables as development level, personal needs, and the situation at hand. Rationales are used in all the teaching techniques of the Boys Town Education Model, but are extremely helpful in a variety of other formal and informal contacts with students.

Keeping rationales brief, personal, and developmentally appropriate will enhance their effectiveness. By themselves, however, rationales will not effectively change behavior. They must be paired with specific teaching and consequences to have the greatest impact.

77

CHAPTER NINE

Effective praise

Praise is a powerful tool for changing and improving the behaviors of your students. It is crucial to the development of positive relationships between you and your students and is very important in strengthening appropriate behavior. Effective Praise allows you to individualize your teaching of social skills by sincerely and enthusiastically recognizing each student's efforts and progress.

What Is Effective Praise?

Effective Praise is a four-step teaching process that is planned and purposeful. It is specific, genuine, and contingent on positive behavior. Effective Praise should be a totally positive interaction because you recognize appropriate behavior and pair specific descriptions with positive consequences. This means you should look carefully for opportunities to praise and reinforce a student's efforts toward positive behavior — to "catch 'em being good." Seizing the chance to praise appropriate behavior increases the odds that the desired behavior will occur again.

Steps to Effective Praise

1. Description of appropriate behavior
2. Rationale
3. Request for acknowledgment
4. Positive consequence

Benefits of Effective Praise

Effective Praise helps develop positive relationships between you and your students. Many students have had difficulty developing constructive relationships with adults in authority, or in making or keeping friends. Effective Praise contributes substantially to helping each child learn and grow because you are recognizing the incremental gains being made by each student.

Many students will begin engaging in behaviors that are noticed by others in order to gain approval. Although many of these behaviors may be seen as prosocial by adults, you must guard against developing students who are merely obedient or compliant, and instead work toward developing a sense of responsibility in students. By helping them realize the benefits they will receive, students will begin to develop an internalized set of values and motivation that will result in a sense of personal power (Miller, 1984). Students who act only to please others remain motivated by external factors, have trouble connecting outcomes to their behavior, and may be ill-prepared to function in the changing world (Bluestein, 1988).

A study by Willner, Braukman, Kirigin, Fixsen, Phillips, and Wolf (1977), found that youth preferred being taught by adults who gave positive feedback, set clear expectations with reasons to back them up, and showed enthusiasm and concern. Similarly, studies have shown that students are more positive and friendly with others in their classrooms and develop more positive "attitudes" when they experience warm and accepting relationships with their teachers (Serow & Soloman, 1979). By design, Effective Praise interactions can meet student needs and facilitate development of relationships.

Effective Praise increases learning and students' behavioral options. As you focus on what a student is doing well, you become more aware of the student's positive behaviors, creating a positive cycle of interactions. The more you're aware of what the student does "right," the more opportunities you have to address and increase positive behavior change. By reinforcing skills that fit societal norms, students increase their repertoire of behavioral responses and begin choosing those that are more readily accepted by others.

How to use Effective Praise

Effective Praise should be used contingently. That is, praise should only be given after a desired behavior occurs, not as a general motivator. By providing praise after a student has demonstrated a particular behavior, you attribute success to the student's effort. This, in turn, implies to the student that similar success can be attained again. It helps students see that they are in charge and in control of their own behavior.

Effective Praise should always specifically describe which behaviors are being recognized and reinforced. Simple, direct statements enhance a student's understanding of what is being praised, and lend credibility to the interaction. Recognizing developmental levels and individual needs when praising students personalizes the interactions and shows students you're sincere.

When to use Effective Praise

Use Effective Praise frequently to reinforce new skills. When students are learning something new, they need reinforcement every time they use the skill correctly. Continuous reinforcement builds and strengthens skills. By reinforcing the use of a skill that is just emerging, you increase the likelihood that the student will use the skill again. Skills are developed more quickly, giving student's a broader repertoire of appropriate behaviors from which to draw.

Effective Praise also is used when you are attempting to strengthen existing positive behaviors or build the fluency of a skill. As a student demonstrates more frequent and appropriate use of a skill, you should use an intermittent schedule of reinforcement to maintain it. Remember that the "element of surprise," or of not knowing when a behavior will be reinforced, actually increases the chances of the student using the skill. Using an intermittent schedule also helps with fading the use of reinforcers to a more realistic level.

It is important to note that general, nonspecific praise also can be used to maintain a skill. Once the behavior seems well-established, you can begin to fade out the use of specific descriptions until the positive behavior can be sustained through the use of general statements, such as "Good job," "Nice work on the project," and so on. The eventual goal of Effective Praise is to develop and maintain behavior through social interactions.

Not giving any praise at all may cause the student to stop using the desired behavior. Behavior that was previously reinforced may diminish or cease if it isn't occasionally recognized and addressed. In general, behavior is best maintained when intermittent reinforcement is used.

The steps of Effective Praise

Before discussing the steps of Effective Praise, it is necessary to emphasize an important aspect of this and other interactions you will have with the students. Whenever you talk with students about their behavior, you communicate not only with your words, but also with your actions. **How** you talk with someone is thought to be considerably more important than **what** you actually say. Because of this, you should pay close attention to factors called "quality components." Basically, these components refer to your positive verbal and nonverbal behaviors. They include looking at the student, using a pleasant voice tone, saying the student's name, smiling, using appropriate humor, and showing enthusiasm. Touching, such as a pat on the shoulder, also can be used, but with obvious caution. Of course, your use of touch will be based on many factors and will vary from one student to another.

Quality components establish and maintain a productive climate for learning. In general, everyone is more receptive to teaching when approached positively. You should not only begin any teaching episode with positive behaviors, but also make sure to maintain them throughout the interaction.

You should feel comfortable and natural when using quality components; students will not respond well to an adult who appears insincere or "robotic." When used naturally and spontaneously, quality components can greatly improve the relationships between you and your students.

Here are the steps of Effective Praise:

1. Description of appropriate behavior: Effective Praise combines specific behavioral statements with your general praise and enthusiasm. Descriptions of appropriate behavior increase the student's level of understanding and the likelihood that he or she will repeat the behavior. These statements help students realize exactly what behaviors fall within the acceptable range. They also help students focus on their accomplishments and progress.

As with any clear description of behavior, describe the circumstances surrounding the behavior — what happened, who was there, when it happened, how it happened, and so on. Again, clear descriptions help teach your youth how to generalize appropriate behavior to similar situations and provide context for your description.

As you make descriptive praise statements, accurately label the skill being taught. For example, "Thanks for looking at me and saying 'Okay' when I asked you to take out your book. You did it right away without bothering others. You did a good job of **following instructions**." Labeling skills and providing specific behavioral descriptions increase the odds that students will successfully learn new ways of behaving and be able to generalize the skill to future situations.

Specifically describe the skill steps performed correctly by the student. For example, "When I told you that you couldn't use the calculator, **you looked at me, said 'Okay,' and then calmly asked for a reason why**. You did a good job of accepting a 'No' answer."

2. Rationale: Students benefit from learning about the consequences of their behavior. A rationale emphasizes this cause-effect relationship. Realistic, individualized rationales let students know why a specific behavior is beneficial to them or others. To your benefit, students will view you as more concerned and fair. Rationales also can help with compliance — students are more likely to do as they're asked when given a reason for doing so. And finally, rationales increase the pleasantness of interactions and are a key to building relationships with students. For example, "When you accept a `No' answer like you just did, others will think of you as someone they can work with. Maybe they will try to say `Yes' to your requests whenever they can."

3. Request acknowledgment: Check to make sure the student is paying attention and understands your rationale by asking for acknowledgment. Although this is a specific step in the sequence, requests for acknowledgment should take place frequently during any teaching. Ask questions such as, "Do you understand?" or "Does that make sense?" or "Do you follow me?" Requesting acknowledgment creates a dialogue; that way, you don't have to lecture.

4. Positive consequence: Positive consequences help promote constructive, rapid behavior change when paired with specific skill teaching. Tell the student what positive consequences was earned for engaging in the specific appropriate behavior. For example, "For doing such a great job of accepting 'No' for an answer, you've earned three extra minutes of independent time," or "You handled that disagreement in your cooperative group so well, you may choose a reading buddy during center time."

In order for the positive consequence to be effective, that is to strengthen and reinforce the behavior, it must meet several conditions. Rewards need to be individualized. Whereas one student may be reinforced by extra recess time, another student may dislike recess. Also, make sure the size of the reinforcer is appropriate – just large enough to maintain or increase the behavior. Remember, there are many kinds of reinforcers, from tangibles (stickers, marbles, toys) to activities (passing out papers, running an errand, working on the computer), to social reinforcers ("Good job!", a pat on the back, smiles). Use the reinforcer that has demonstrated a positive effect on the student's behavior in the past. Also, refer to chapter 5, "Principles of Behavior" for more help with reinforcers.

Example 1

Nate is a seventh-grade student in your class. He frequently has difficulty turning assignments in on time, so you have been working with him in this area. Today, Nate turned in his homework from last night and just finished his math assignment with the rest of the class.

1. Description of appropriate behavior — "Nate, you've really been working hard! First thing this morning, you handed in your homework, and just now you finished your math paper right on time. Great job!"

2. Rationale — "Finishing homework and other assignments helps you learn better and faster. By doing assignments on time, you can practice what you just learned and get more of the assignment right because it's fresh in your mind. Then you can move on to the next thing."

3. Request acknowledgment — "Do you see why finishing your work on time is important?"

4. Positive consequence — "For turning your assignments in on time, you've earned the privilege of being media monitor this afternoon. Way to go!"

Example 2

Asia is in your second-grade classroom this year. She is most often quiet and shy, participating minimally in class discussions. Today, during opening activities, she shared some information about her baby sister. After opening, when the other children have started their journal entries, you go over to talk with Asis.

1. Description of appropriate behavior — "Asia, thanks for telling us about your baby sister this morning during opening. You raised your hand, then used a voice that everyone could hear."

2. Rationale — "Sharing in a group can be scary, but it helps others get to know you and gives you things to talk about later, too."

3. Request acknowledgment — "See what I mean?"

4. Positive consequence — "Since you did such a nice job of sharing in group, you can choose — would you rather hand out our math materials or be first to pick up your computer partner for spelling games?"

General considerations

Your teaching has the greatest impact when it closely follows a behavior. Relevant, immediate feedback enhances learning. There may be times, however, when you don't observe a positive behavior, but still can praise the student for the choices he or she made. In these cases, you'll need to rely on other sources of information, and talk with the student as soon as you can. For example, another teacher might tell you that she saw one of your students appropriately disagreeing with another student instead of arguing or fighting. In this situation, get as much information as you can, then praise the student for the appropriate behavior.

Most of the time, you will use Effective Praise privately with the student. This provides complete and personal attention. Although occasionally appropriate, public praise can be embarrassing to a student and have counterproductive effects. Public praise probably should be reserved for times when the entire class has demonstrated a skill or when you know a particular student will respond positively.

Effective Praise does not replace your use of general praise. It is intended as a teaching tool and doesn't need to be employed every time a student does something well. Tailor the type and frequency of your teaching to suit each child's particular needs.

Positive interactions with students, including Effective Praise, should occur at least four times as often as you use corrective interactions. This 4:1 ratio enhances relationships, results in more positive behavior from your students, and helps build "reinforcement reserves" for students. Frequently telling students what they are doing well helps them focus on their positive behaviors. This can help them feel more competent and better about themselves. When Corrective Teaching does occur, students have both emotional and token reinforcement reserves to fall back on. The 4:1 ratio is a minimum standard; many children need higher ratios of positive to corrective feedback to show improvement.

Summary

Effective Praise is a four-step planned teaching process that is used to recognize and reward a student's appropriate behavior. The way you use Effective Praise is very important. When given in a manner that is direct, personal, specific, and pleasant, it will seem natural and sincere. Noticing what each student does well will show that you are sensitive and responsive to the needs of all your students. Perhaps more importantly, your students will feel better about themselves and will be encouraged to work even harder in the positive, caring educational atmosphere you have created.

CHAPTER TEN

Preventive teaching

New teachers often worry about whether they will be able to control their students' behavior. They hope that most children have received a gradual education on how to behave from their parents and other adults through modeling, discussions, praise, and discipline. Unfortunately, many students today have not been a part of such a natural process. In fact, they often have had inconsistent or dysfunctional models who have left them confused and socially unskilled. Teachers who effectively use Preventive Teaching, along with other consistent teaching techniques, can help these youngsters make up for skill deficits.

▶ Classroom management and Preventive Teaching

A synthesis of considerable research (Northwest Regional Education Laboratory, 1990) revealed strong evidence that when effective classroom strategies are employed, student behavior, attitudes, and achievement improve measurably. Two key elements of good management cited in the report are establishing and maintaining consistent expectations and developing positive teacher-student relationships. These factors have been found to be far more effective as classroom management techniques than those which seek to maintain control by focusing solely or primarily on student misbehavior. Unfortunately, teachers often tend to notice and deal with disruptive behavior as a way to maintain order in the classroom. The methods used to do this can have a significant negative effect on students. Jones and Jones (1981), for example, found that negative remarks by teachers are correlated with student dislike for school. Similarly, Becker, Engelmann, and Thomas (1975) reported that critical remarks by teachers tend to worsen student behavior rather than improve it.

More-successful approaches to classroom management involve techniques designed to prevent problems before they occur (Kounin, 1970). Kounin found that one way to minimize student disruption was to maximize the time spent in active learning. Addressing and resolving minor incidents before they became major problems decreased time spent on disruptive behavior. Kounin found that teachers can achieve more effective classroom management by:

1. Watching classroom activity at all times. Effective managers station themselves so they can scan the entire classroom and see each student. This enables them to spot and deal with minor problems before they become serious or disruptive. This form of monitoring also communicates to students that the teacher is very aware of what is occurring in the classroom at all times.

2. Performing several tasks at once. Effective managers can lead a group discussion, take care of "housekeeping" activities such as attendance, or engage students in small group activities while also monitoring and addressing student behavior.

3. Being prepared to teach. This allows teachers to maintain a brisk pace and avoid lapses because of the need to check a manual or scan notes to see what to do next. Effective managers also maintain the "academic flow" by dealing with inattention without disrupting the class. Common techniques include establishing eye contact, asking the student a question pertaining to the subject, or regaining attention with a comment to the student.

Using direct classroom observations, Anderson, Everton, and Emmer (1980) expanded on Kounin's original research and found that classrooms ran smoother when teachers demonstrated these key behaviors and set expectations at the beginning of the school year. Teachers experiencing the most success spent quite a bit of time on classroom rules and procedures during the first few weeks of school, introducing them gradually to avoid overloading students with too much information. Effective managers went beyond merely informing students of rules and expectations. In short, they taught rules and procedures in the same manner as academic subjects — through modeling, discussion, practice, and feedback on performance. Additionally, consequences for appropriate and inappropriate behaviors were consistently applied.

▶ Preventive Teaching in society

Practical applications of Preventive Teaching can be found in a variety of social and daily living contexts. Preventive Teaching is used whenever particular skills or behaviors need to be learned to handle specific situations. For example, in fire drills, occupants of a building locate alarms and extinguishers, and practice using exit routes in order to help reduce the chances of serious injury in a fire. To prepare their children to walk to school, parents may schedule a practice walk in which they show the route to school, where and how to cross streets, and where to find "block homes" a child can go to for help if necessary. We teach children how to dial the "911" emergency number to report an accident, injury, or threatening situation, and provide them with rules about dealing with strangers. On-the-job training programs provide instruction in dealing with difficult customers, handling hazardous materials, using new equipment, and many other topics to prepare employees for situations they may face. By reviewing and practicing specific behaviors that match particular situations in advance, greater success can be expected when the actual situation is encountered.

Benefits of Preventive Teaching

In addition to the general benefit of improving classroom management, as described earlier in this chapter, Preventive Teaching provides many specific benefits to students and teachers.

1. Preventive Teaching enhances the effectiveness of teachers. From the start, teachers can set clear expectations for student behavior. Through "up-front" teaching, you are able to establish and demonstrate tolerance levels and consequences. You are able to model these expectations as you teach skills, and communicate the importance of skill-building through repeated instruction and feedback to students. You also can keep a strong focus on individual goals for students, knowing that expectations may vary from student to student.

2. Preventive Teaching increases the opportunities for student learning. Because students are actively involved in Preventive Teaching lessons, their chances of acquiring skills are improved. Gaining their input, having them practice skills in "safe" situations, and allowing them to give positive feedback to others keep students involved in the learning process. They may acquire skills more quickly because lessons are presented at a neutral time — that is, in the absence of interfering behavior — which may help them be more open to feedback on their performance.

3. Preventive Teaching builds relationships and increases comfort levels. The entire Preventive Teaching process demonstrates respect, concern and fairness. It allows student to learn and practice skills at a neutral time, thereby providing a non-threatening, positive atmosphere. The use of positive consequences demonstrates recognition of the students' efforts and communicates the importance of the skills you are working on. Teachers often report feeling more confident and comfortable when their students are placed in situations that may be new, different, or have the potential to affect others (e.g. an assembly, field trip, or guest speaker). The time invested in skill development can pay off with greater student self-confidence and less stress for the teacher.

When to use Preventive Teaching

Preventive Teaching can be used to focus on basic or advanced social skills and to prepare students for specific situations or circumstances, and to individualize social skills teaching to fit the needs of individual students. Although the most logical time to use Preventive Teaching may seem like the beginning of each school year to establish classroom rules, it can and should be used whenever a need is identified.

Perhaps your first opportunity to use Preventive Teaching is when you introduce the Boys Town Social Skills Curriculum. You should plan to spend some time talking about social skills — what they are, how you will teach them to students, why they are important, and the students' responsibilities for using them. You'll also use Preventive Teaching to talk to your students about other components of the overall program, such as Teaching Interactions, consequences, and office referrals.

The beginning of the school year is an ideal time to use Preventive Teaching to establish classroom rules and expectations. You can help your students "buy in" by making sure they are actively involved in creating the rules and guidelines.

You should plan to use Preventive Teaching whenever the need arises during the course of the school year. Special events or situations, individual needs of students, identification of weak skills for the entire class, and the entry of a new student all suggest the use of Preventive Teaching.

Preventive Teaching can be used with individual students, small groups, or the whole class. While individualized Preventive Teaching typically focuses on a student's particular areas of need, group instruction is geared toward skills that all students need to know. Group lessons can be related to academic content or concepts, such as safe use of science lab equipment or types of punctuation, or to behavioral expectations like how to introduce oneself or how to act at an assembly. Group teaching allows you to efficiently teach necessary skills and to interact positively with students.

▶ Preventive Teaching sequences

Preventive Teaching comprises three stages: Planned Teaching, Preteaching, and Preventive Prompt. Planned Teaching is used to introduce a new skill to students at a planned, neutral time. Preteaching is used to reintroduce a skill prior to a specific event or situation in which the student will need to use the skill. A Preventive Prompt is a brief reminder to the student about the skill immediately before the event or situation occurs.

Planned Teaching

Planned Teaching is a systematic introduction of a new skill to a student or group of students at a planned, neutral time. Planned Teaching should be used frequently, especially with new students, to help them learn and practice the social skills. The steps of a Planned Teaching sequence are shown below.

Planned Teaching sequence (Stage I)

1. Introduce skill
2. Describe appropriate behavior
3. Give rationale

87

4. Request acknowledgment
5. Practice
6. Feedback
7. Positive consequence
8. Establish future/follow-up practice

1. Introduce skill: To begin the Planned Teaching sequence, label the skill to be taught and carefully describe situations in which the skill may be used. A number of specific examples should be provided and students should have opportunities to contribute and ask questions. By describing the skill in a variety of contexts, you'll help students generalize the application of the skill to a variety of antecedent conditions or settings. A demonstration of the skill also may be an effective teaching tool during the introduction.

Example: "Today, we're going to talk about a skill called 'How to Introduce Yourself.' Everybody think about a time when you introduced yourself to someone. Be ready to share about that time...."

2. Describe appropriate behavior: Following the general explanation, you should specifically describe each step of the skill. In cases where you're teaching a set of behaviors that does not appear on the 16-skill curriculum list, analyze the overall behavior (e.g. "staying on task") into observable components and teach each step. Make sure you clearly state your expectations or criterion levels to achieve the best results. You may need to spend time defining terms, discussing exceptions or special circumstances, and teaching specific behaviors that make up some of your steps (See Chapter 6, Teaching the Curriculum Skills.)"

Example: "Here are the steps for 'How to Introduce Yourself...' Let's talk about shaking someone's hand. When do you think you would or wouldn't do that...? What else might you do, instead...? What would you do if the other person didn't extend his or her hand...?"

3. Rationale: List a variety of benefits or payoffs that may be derived from using the new skill. Students should be involved in generating rationales to enhance meaning and ownership.

Example: "Think about why it could be important to introduce yourself in the way we just talked about. Be ready to share your ideas."

4. Request acknowledgment: Including this step allows you to determine whether students understand why or how using a skill can be beneficial to them. Students don't have to agree with every rationale provided, but should acknowledge that they can understand the benefits involved. A second part of this step is to have students repeat the skill steps to you. Requesting group responses, mixed with randomly calling on individual students, may be an effective way to increase participation and attention. Depending on the skill levels of the students, you may want to use verbal or visual cues to prompt responses.

Example: "Can everyone see why it may be important to introduce yourself like we've talked about...? Give me a 'thumbs up' if that makes sense." (part 1)

"Everybody think about the first step of the skill. Look at me when you know what it is...Tell us the first step...Michelle." (part 2)

5. Practice: This step actively involves students in brief role-plays and demonstrations. During the practice, you can monitor the students' progress and adjust your teaching, as needed. You should maximize the time spent in practice by including a variety of activities. Paired practice, in which students work with a partner, provides a chance for everyone to participate. Small groups can be equally effective and provide an opportunity for students to work on cooperative skills, as well. You should be actively involved during the practice by closely observing and monitoring group interactions.

Student-to-teacher practices can be used when teaching individual student groups. You may ask for volunteers to demonstrate the skill with you as the class observes and prepares to giver positive feedback. Since the greatest amount of learning takes place by doing, you should plan to allow an adequate amount of time on this step.

Example: "Turn to your partner and practice the steps of 'How to Introduce Yourself.' I'll be watching for all the steps we discussed..."

6. Feedback: Specific, descriptive feedback should follow the practice(s). If the lesson was structured well, most of your feedback should be positive, but there also may be opportunities for corrective feedback. Generally, the feedback should be given by the teacher or instructor to ensure its appropriateness.

Example: "Great! I saw lots of smiles and head nods, and heard nice voice tones and words like 'Nice to meet you.' I even saw lots of you shake hands with your partner."

7. Positive consequence: Planned Teaching always includes a positive consequence for positive behaviors exhibited by your students. Consequences should be varied, ranging from a pat on the back to extra recess or homework passes. Determining consequences is generally easy when working with an individual student, but somewhat more difficult when teaching a large group. Group consequences must be carefully selected to make sure the reinforcement is contingent upon everyone's performance. Group behaviors you may be able to reinforce include participating, staying on task, making positive comments, and practicing the skill. Individual efforts also should be recognized by privately discussing appropriate behaviors with the particular student(s). For example, a student who volunteered to demonstrate or practice the skill in front of the class may receive an additional positive consequence for volunteering.

Example: "Everyone did so well practicing the skill and participating in the lesson, you've earned three minutes of quiet visiting time with your neighbor."

8. Future/follow-up practice: To close the Planned Teaching sequence, tell the student(s) about the next opportunity for practicing the skill with you. Establish exactly when the next rehearsal or review will occur to help students understand the importance of the lesson. Follow-up sessions will reinforce your initial teaching efforts by allowing additional exposure to the skill during neutral times. To increase generalization, you may assign homework or other activities (See Teaching for Generalization, later in this chapter).

Example: "Tomorrow, right after opening activities, we'll again talk about 'How to Introduce Yourself'."

Preteaching

Preteaching is the second stage of Preventive Teaching. During the Preteaching sequence, the skill is reintroduced prior to a specific situation in which the student needs to use the skill. Preteaching reinforces concepts presented in the original Planned Teaching sequence and prepares students to handle a specific, upcoming situation. The Preteaching sequence follows:

Preteaching sequence (Stage II)

1. Reintroduce skill
2. Describe appropriate behavior
3. Rationale
4. Request acknowledgment
5. Practice (optional)
6. Feedback
7. Positive consequence
8. Inform student of upcoming situation

The Preteaching sequence is similar to the Planned Teaching sequence, but because many of the concepts are being reintroduced, it may not take as much time. Students should be more involved in the Preteaching sequence, providing descriptions of appropriate behavior (i.e. skill steps) and rationales. The practice portion of the Preteaching sequence is optional, the decision to practice hinging on the student's needs, including how well the student remembers and understands the skill being taught. Feedback should, again, be positive and specific, and corrective, if needed. Students will earn a positive consequence for participating in a Preteaching sequence, as they did during Planned Teaching.

Finally, students should be informed of a specific, upcoming situation in which they'll need to use the skill they've been practicing. For example, they may be asked to introduce themselves to a new student who will be enrolling in your class the following day. Or you may inform them that the school will be having a fire drill sometime within the next few days, and that they'll need to demonstrate their skills of quickly and quietly exiting the classroom and building. If the skill you've been teaching can be used in a variety of situations (e.g. accepting criticism, following instructions), you may inform students that you'll be planning different situations in which they can practice the skill they've been learning.

Preventive Prompt

The last stage of Preventive Teaching is a Preventive Prompt. The prompt is a brief reminder or statement about the use of a skill just prior to the event or situation in which a student will use it. Examples of preventive prompts include asking a student, "Do you remember the steps to following instructions?", just before instructing the student to clean the blackboard, or saying, "Remember the steps we talked about for leaving the building during a fire drill" as the alarm begins to sound. Additionally, prompts should not be used "after the fact." A Preventive Prompt is not intended to remind students about what they should have done after you've observed inappropriate behavior. For example, after a student has failed to follow a particular instruction you've given, you should not respond by saying "Now, remember what we've been talking about with 'How to Follow Instructions'...?"

The eventual goal is that you will be able to fade prompts and that students will automatically use skills in response to various situations or stimuli. Through repeated guided practice, students learn new responses to situations and begin to substitute skill-based behaviors for old behavioral patterns.

▶ Teaching for generalization

While the entire Preventive Teaching process aids with generalization, some of the steps are geared even more specifically to promoting the use of social skills in other situations. Of the steps, rationales most directly help students understand potential positive outcomes in various applications. The practice step helps students "overlearn" a skill which may, then, transfer to novel situations.

Other generalization techniques which easily fit the education setting, as discussed in Dowd and Tierney (1992), include:

1. Training in different settings: The actual training setting should resemble, as closely as possible, situations the student is likely to encounter. Since many of our lessons are intended to carry over to classroom or other school related situations, this facet of instruction should be fairly easy to achieve. You may increase the "realism" of your instruction by having students practice skills in actual contexts, as appropriate. For example, if you are teaching "lunchroom" or "assembly" behavior, taking your students to those areas of the building to practice skills could facilitate transfer.

2. Training with different people: Students may generalize skills more easily and quickly if they receive instruction from different people. Whenever possible, include people who will be directly involved with your students in different contexts. Having the playground aide, your "team teacher," or a counselor participate in practices for situations which routinely involve them, will enhance transfer.

3. "Homework" assignments: Like academics, the use of social skills homework can help students retain and generalize new information. You may ask students to try out a particular social skill with a friend, family member, or other adult, then record the result and be prepared to report outcomes during the next session.

Summary

Preventive Teaching builds relationships and fosters skill development. It can be used to teach basic and advanced curriculum skills and to prepare students for specific situations or circumstances. Preventive Teaching can be used effectively with individual students, small groups, or an entire class. Consistent use of Preventive Teaching can decrease the seriousness and frequency of problem behaviors in the classroom by helping students systematically learn new patterns of behavior.

92

CHAPTER ELEVEN

The teaching interaction

The Teaching Interaction is a nine-step process used to address inappropriate social behaviors and teach prosocial alternatives. Consistent use of the Teaching Interaction allows you to effectively meet the individual needs of each student. Teaching Interactions also help you build and maintain relationships with your students. By teaching alternative behaviors in a calm and pleasant manner, you show your concern for students and enhance the effectiveness of your teaching.

▶ When to use the Teaching Interaction

When a student behaves inappropriately, you should use a Teaching Interaction to teach a new skill or strengthen a weak skill. Your primary goal is to teach alternative, replacement behaviors and reduce or eliminate inappropriate ones. Rather than suppressing inappropriate behavior, you focus on building self-management skills so students can make better choices about how they act. Consistent teaching, including opportunities to practice a new skill, makes learning more efficient because the time you spend addressing behavior is productive and relevant.

Simply addressing inappropriate behavior as it happens will not, by itself, promote positive change. To build and maintain prosocial behavior, you must reinforce students' efforts to use appropriate behavior at least four times as often as you address their mistakes. Frequent reinforcement lets students know you notice what they do well and increases the likelihood of the behavior reoccurring. (See Chapter 9, "Effective Praise.")

Teaching Interaction components

The nine steps of the Teaching Interaction can, over time, help students learn better responses to potential problems. Corrective Teaching occurs in an atmosphere of genuine concern for students (Dowd & Tierney, 1992).

The Teaching Interaction

1. Initial praise or empathy
2. Description of Inappropriate behavior
3. Description of appropriate behavior
4. Rationale
5. Request for acknowledgment
6. Practice
7. Feedback
8. Consequences
9. General praise/Redirection

When you approach a student to discuss an inappropriate behavior, it is important to be conscious of your behavior. Even though your focus is on correction of a mistake, you want to convey care and concern through your general tone and nonverbal behaviors. Thus, your teaching should always be accompanied by positive "quality components." These include looking at the student, using a pleasant voice tone, calling the student by name, having a pleasant or neutral facial expression. To make your teaching personal and to maintain the student's dignity, quietly address their behavior, within reasonable close proximity and on the same physical plane. Used throughout your teaching, these components increase student receptivity to feedback and help you maintain a positive tone.

Initial praise or empathy

The interaction begins with a positive statement related to the behavior you are teaching. Your praise will appear much more genuine if it is related to the teaching situation. For example, Desiree wants your attention. She waves her arm in the air and calls out loudly, "I need some help over here!" You could praise her for a number of behaviors: staying in her seat, raising her hand, asking for help, staying on task, looking at you. In another situation, you greet Dan as he enters the classroom. He looks away from you, rolls his eyes, and walks by you without saying anything. Although it appears that there were no behaviors that warrant praise, you could still praise Dan for getting to class on time that day or going promptly to his seat.

Initial praise reinforces approximations of the desired behavior and helps the student recognize progress. It enhances your relationships with students by showing them that you are aware of their accomplishments, even when they display inappropriate behaviors. Also, by focusing on something the student did well, you start the interaction on a positive note and are less likely to be seen as negative or punishing.

You also may choose to begin your interaction with an empathy statement to let the student know that you understand what he or she is experiencing. Like praise, empathy helps set a positive tone and makes students more receptive to your correction. Using Desiree's situation as an example, you may empathize with her needing your help by saying, "I can understand that you'd really like some help with your assignment." You may find that older students respond better to empathy than praise, as it may seem more genuine and less contrived.

Without the consistent use of this step, students may come to view you as punishing — someone who is quick to criticize mistakes and slow to recognize accomplishments. If this happens, students may begin to actively avoid you because you represent negative consequences to them.

Description of inappropriate behavior

Specifically describe to the student his or her inappropriate behavior. Using objective, behavioral terms, describe antecedent events and student actions to structure your teaching. For example, in the earlier situation with Dan, you might say, "When you came in this morning and I said 'Hello,' you looked away and rushed past me without saying anything." This description "sets the stage" for your teaching by providing the student a clear picture of what he did and helping you decide what skill to teach.

Avoid using judgmental terms in your descriptions. Describe behaviors instead of perceived intent or motive. For example, instead of telling a student, "Why are you being so disrespectful to Sue? You were just trying to hurt her feelings, weren't you?", focus on the specific behaviors. Use a statement such as, "When you passed by Sue's desk, you told her she was a slob and then laughed at her." (See Chapter 7, "Observing and Describing Behavior," for a complete discussion of these concepts.)

Keep your descriptions brief and to the point in order to avoid badgering the student. Focus on the most overt or obvious behaviors, then move on. The purpose of this step is to increase the student's awareness of the behavior, so you can shift the emphasis to providing appropriate alternatives.

Description of appropriate behavior

Following the description of the inappropriate behavior, teach the student an appropriate alternative behavior. This description not only helps the student understand your expectations, but also assists him or her in learning social skills that can be used in other settings. To promote this generalization, use words like, "A better way to greet someone...," or "Whenever someone gives you feedback...." Using this phrasing, rather than "I" statements such as "I'd like you to," focuses the student on self-management skills instead of teacher-pleasing behavior.

As part of your description, label the skill so the teaching will be clear for you and the student. Teach each of the incremental behaviors that comprise the skill. For example, "A better way to greet people is to look at them, smile, use a pleasant voice tone, and say something like 'Good morning.'" If necessary, you can demonstrate or model the behaviors in order to make the description clear for the student. (See Chapter 6, "Teaching the Curriculum Skills.")

Rationale

Offering the student a rationale after the description of the appropriate behavior tells him or her why the skill should be learned and used. The rationale should be personal, skill-based, brief, and should explain the short-term benefits the student can receive by using the skill. This helps the student internalize the behavior. Your rationale may explain the benefits for using a skill, negative outcomes for not using the skill, or how the student's behavior affects others. (See Chapter 8, "Rationales.")

Rationales help students understand the link between their behavior and possible outcomes. This helps them learn to take responsibility for their behaviors, rather than blaming outside forces for what happens to them. It also empowers students to understand that their behavioral choices, in part, determine what may happen to them. For example, you may tell a student who is learning how to greet others and is interested in making friends, "If you say 'Hi' to people in the hall, it may help you start a conversation with them and they may want to get to know you better."

Request for acknowledgment

Requests for acknowledgment should occur throughout the teaching process to gauge student comprehension and to promote student participation. This component follows the rationale so that you can determine whether the student understands the rationale. Questions like, "Does that make sense?" and "Do you understand?" are effective at determining student responsiveness. Avoid asking the student questions like, "Do you agree?" or "How do you feel about that?"These types of questions can lead to the student arguing with you. The important point here is not that the student agrees with you, but that he or she understands what you are saying.

It also is a good idea to have the student repeat the skill's steps before practicing. This is most beneficial to students who are just learning the skill, or students who have had repeated difficulties with certain behaviors. Rather than asking a question like, "Could you tell me the steps for greeting someone?" and risk getting a "No" answer, say something like, "Tell me how you're going to greet people now," or "Tell me the steps for greeting others."

Practice

Having the student practice the alternative behavior provides an opportunity to immediately use the skill in a "low-risk" situation. Just as practice helps a student learn an academic concept, the practice step acts as a bridge between the initial inappropriate behavior and progress toward skill proficiency. The student's performance during the practice also gives you an idea of how well you taught the skill. This is the only time during the Teaching Interaction where you can assess your teaching effectiveness and determine whether reteaching is necessary.

In order for the practice to be most effective, set it up very clearly for the student. The student should know exactly what he or she is supposed to do, what skill is being practiced, and what you are going to do. For example, in setting up a practice for greeting someone, you might say, "Dan, here's an opportunity to use greeting skills just like we talked about. This time, you'll look at me, smile, and in a pleasant voice tone say 'Good morning.'" Ask the student if he or she understands your instructions so the student knows what to do. Say something like, "Does that make sense?" Then give the student a cue to begin the practice to separate your setup from the actual practice.

Usually, the student will practice the skill in the original context. That is, if the student had trouble accepting criticism about a term paper, you'd give him or her the same criticism in the practice. If the original situation was somewhat "heated," you should make sure to prompt the student that you'll practice the same situation again. This may help you avoid any of the difficulties the student had with the original situation, you bring closure to the episode, and there should be a greater transfer of learning.

Practice sessions can sometimes be more successful and helpful to the student if you use a similar but hypothetical situation. This is especially true if the original issue involved a very emotional or intense response by the student, or if it was disruptive to your class. If so, you may choose to teach the same skill in a different context. For example, Darla is out of her seat looking out the window. You give her an instruction to sit down, but she remains standing for quite some time before going back to her seat. Now, when you teach the skill of "How to Follow Instructions," it would distract the class and Darla if you sent her back to the window during the practice. Instead, you could have her practice following another instruction, such as getting started on her assignment, opening her book to a certain page, or taking out necessary supplies for the class. All these instructions would lead Darla toward being back on task with the rest of the class. Similarly, if the original situation involved an intense student reaction, you may choose to practice the skill in a pretend situation first. After a successful practice, you then could return to the actual situation for a final practice of the skill.

Some practices will have to be done later, at a more suitable time. For example, a student who comes into class late may have to practice being on time when she goes to her next class or when she returns to your class the next day. In any practice situation, if the student doesn't achieve predetermined criteria, he or she should practice again. Most of the time, the student will practice the entire skill as you have described it. However, for students who are just learning skills, you may be looking for only a few steps at a time. These students are in the "shaping" process; they require praise for approximations of the desired behaviors.

Feedback

Following the practice, provide the student with positive feedback about his or her performance that includes specific descriptions of the student's behavior. Depending on the student's original behavior and skill level, your specific description of the practice could include anything from a verbal replay to selected highlights. For example, Malcolm has been working on the skill of "Making a Request" for some time. Although he has learned most of the steps, he often forgets to say "Thank-you." When he successfully practices the skill using all the steps, your feedback might be, "Great request! This time you remembered to say 'Thank you.'" If another practice is necessary, praise the student for any approximations of the behavior before asking him or her to practice again.

Praise and descriptive feedback will increase the likelihood that students will engage in appropriate behaviors again. Your feedback also demonstrates concern, shows support for students' progress, and reinforces appropriate behavior. Finally, it contributes to and helps build relationships between you and your students.

Consequences (response cost and positive correction)

For engaging in an inappropriate behavior, the student should earn a negative consequence (response cost). In other words, he loses something reinforcing to him. The negative consequence serves to deter the student from engaging in that behavior in the future. For further illustration of this concept, see Chapter 5, "Principles of Behavior."

When issuing negative consequences, you will want to consider the following:

Size. Consider how large the consequence has to be in order to be effective. Start small, using the least amount of "response cost" possible to produce the greatest change. When deciding the size of the consequence, consider the frequency with which the behavior occurs, and its severity. A frequent or severe behavior would obviously warrant a heavier consequence.

Difficulty. Also consider the difficulty the student has in performing the appropriate alternative behavior. If the student is very deficient in the skill of following instructions, for example, he will probably need many opportunities to practice the skill during the course of the school day, and many opportunities to make mistakes. If his teacher were to issue a large consequence every time the student did not follow instructions, the student would be buried in penalties by mid-morning, and have little incentive to work on using the skill.

Appropriateness of the consequence. Like rewards, negative consequences need to be individualized to insure that they are indeed effective. To determine the effectiveness of a response cost, look at the behavioral outcome. That is, if the behavior diminishes or extinguishes, the consequence was effective; if the behavior continues or strengthens, it was not. For example, Theo loves playing soccer with his friends at recess. When he has difficulty staying on-task during class, he loses 10 minutes of his recess so that he can practice the skill and finish his work. Losing 10 minutes of soccer time is enough of a consequence to help Theo stay on task the following day.

In addition to the negative consequence of a response cost, in the Boys Town Education Model it is combined with praise and/or positive correction for practicing the alternative appropriate behavior. That is, the student loses something reinforcing, but because he practiced the skill during the teaching interaction, he "earns back" part of what he lost. This combination helps motivate students to change their behaviors and to cooperate during your teaching. It also allows you to reinforce the student for correcting his behavior and engaging in appropriate alternative behavior.

When issuing negative consequences in the Teaching Interaction, keep in mind that consequences should be viewed as if on a continuum, starting with the least restrictive consequence that will promote the greatest behavior change. The least restrictive consequence is the Teaching Interaction itself. The student loses some of his time as you address his behavior and have him practice the alternative. With Dan, for example, the issuing of the consequence may sound like this:

"Because you had trouble greeting me this morning, we had to take a little time and discuss a better way to greet people, and then practice that skill. But you did a nice practice, so why don't you take your seat and we'll get started."

Many student have difficulty seeing the connection between their behavior and the natural consequences that ensue. In addition to the Teaching Interaction as a consequence, you may also want to point out to students what occurred naturally as a result of their behavior. For example, when Darnell yells out to get his teacher's help, he doesn't get the help he wants as quickly as he desires. But by practicing, he can get her assistance and the help he needs. His consequence may sound like this:

"Because you had a hard time getting my attention, you still haven't gotten your question answered. But since you practiced, I can answer it now and give you the help you need."

When Maria makes a request for more paper by saying "Gimme some paper now!", she has to wait to get her paper until after she practices the correct way of making a request.

When behavior becomes more severe or more frequent, as previously mentioned, the size of the consequence should fit the severity or frequency of the behavior. Still, your consequence should be a logical response cost. For example, when Troy fights on the playground, he has to stand by the teacher for the remainder of recess. For practicing the alternative behavior (ignoring peers, taking turns, etc.), he earns back some of that time. Because Christy is repeatedly off-task, she is unable to finish her work and must stay after school and finish it while she practices the skill of staying on task.

Some situations call for compensatory behavior and/or restitution, another logical consequence. When Bo gets into a fight with a classmate, he has to apologize and do something nice for the other student. For behavior that is severe or becoming patternistic, you may want to contact parents to set up a conference to discuss possible interventions.

General praise/Redirection

This step is as much for you as it is for the student. It is designed to positively redirect the student and end the interaction on a positive note. Rather than summarizing the interaction, simple and brief praise like "Nice job" or "Good work" is the most natural way to end your teaching. Any further mention of the student's behavior, even when stated in a positive manner, may serve to undermine your efforts. Statements such as, "Now I know you'll be able to follow instructions" or "I'm sure you won't make the same mistake next time" can communicate unrealistic expectations, setting students up for failure.

Sample Teaching Interaction

Dan is a fourth-grade student. As he enters your classroom one morning, and you greet him, he looks away from you and says nothing as he rushes past. As the rest of the class visits quietly before the bell rings, you approach Dan at his desk to talk with him about his greeting.

Initial praise or empathy: *"Dan, I'm glad you made it to school this morning and I appreciate you looking up just now."*

Description of inappropriate behavior: *"When I greeted you a moment ago, you rushed past me, and didn't say anything."*

Description of appropriate behavior: *"Whenever someone greets you, whether it's a teacher or other kids at school, it would be better if you would look at the person, smile, use a pleasant voice, and say something like 'Hello.'"*

Rationale: *"Dan, when you greet people like that, they're more likely to see you as friendly and want to get to know you better. You could even end up with more friends."*

Request for acknowledgment: *"Do you understand what I'm saying?* (Dan says, "Uh-huh.") *Okay, tell me the steps for greeting others."* (Dan gives all the steps of the skill.)

Practice: *"Good job, Dan. Let's try that greeting again. This time, I want you to greet me by using all those steps. We'll just pretend we're standing at the door like before."* (Dan successfully practices the skill.)

Feedback: *"Excellent! This time you looked right at me, smiled, and pleasantly said 'Hello.'*

Consequences: *"Initially, Dan, you had some trouble greeting me, and we had to take some time this morning and talk about a better way to greet others. Because of that, you missed out on some visiting time with your friends. But you did a nice job practicing the skill with me. And, you still have some time left to go talk with your friends."*

General praise/Redirection: *"Thanks Dan, you did a really nice job listening to me. After the bell rings, let's start working on your vocabulary review."*

General considerations

Throughout the interaction, you should recognize and praise appropriate behaviors, particularly those that have been difficult for the student in the past. When you notice and praise these behaviors, students are more likely to continue to be responsive to your feedback.

When you notice mild inattentive behaviors before or during a Teaching Interaction, briefly prompt for the student's attention. Teaching social skills, like academics, is not effective when the student is inattentive. For example, you could say, "Edwin, could you put your book down and look at me, please? Thanks." If the behavior continues, escalates, or reoccurs frequently, you should use techniques described in Chapter 12, "Ongoing Behavior."

Just as consequences should be viewed on a continuum, there should be a continuum of interventions when dealing with an inappropriate student behavior. It would be impossible, as well as unnecessary, to do a nine-step Teaching Interaction following every inappropriate student behavior. Initially prompting the inappropriate behavior is the least restrictive intervention. Make your prompts as instructional as possible so as to prevent further intervention.

Example: "Instead of talking out, James, you should raise your hand and wait for me to call on you."

"Remember to say 'Please' when you ask for something, Terence."

If the inappropriate behavior diminishes or discontinues, then you know the prompt was effective. When the behavior becomes more severe or more frequent, your prompt was ineffective and a Teaching Interaction may be necessary. Always remember, however, to recognize and reinforce the student for engaging in the prosocial alternative behavior at least 4 times as often as you teach or attend to the inappropriate behavior to help the student build the behavior into his repertoire.

And finally, the ultimate goal of using the Teaching Interaction is to give your students a cognitive tool for self-management. Initially, you will guide them through the steps of the Teaching Interaction by helping them identify more appropriate alternative behaviors. Eventually, your students will incorporate what you have taught and be able to correct their social errors on their own learning new prosocial behavior as well.

Summary

The Teaching Interaction is a flexible tool that can be adapted to meet students' varying needs. By modifying your language and adjusting the expectations for the student, you can successfully use the Teaching Interaction with students of all ages and skill levels.

Ongoing behavior

Teaching Interactions are used when a student engages in inappropriate behaviors. However, nearly all students will at times have trouble accepting your feedback while they are being corrected and will display behaviors that interfere with your teaching. This is called **ongoing behavior**, and is defined as inattentive or problem behavior that occurs during a Teaching Interaction and interferes with the student's ability to learn.

Dealing with ongoing behavior when it occurs benefits both you and the student. Rather than responding emotionally, you should view these behaviors as skill deficits and as opportunities to teach students better ways to manage their behavior when faced with criticism. You will be better able to deal with ongoing behavior calmly and objectively once you "depersonalize" it by viewing it as a "teachable moment."

When a student begins to show signs of not accepting correction during a Teaching Interaction, it will be necessary to temporarily stop the interaction. You can't "teach over" the interfering behaviors during social skills instruction any more than you can when teaching a critical academic concept. Both require student attentiveness and responsiveness. Instead, you'll use techniques (explained later in this chapter) that are designed to help the student regain self-control before you continue teaching.

Ongoing behavior can take many forms, ranging from subtle to overt. Some examples include:

Facial expressions — looking away, glaring, rolling the eyes, frowning, and grinning.

Verbal behaviors — interrupting, arguing, swearing, talking to others, and mumbling.

Body movements — slouching, folding arms, turning and/or walking away, moving excessively, making noise with hands or other objects, gestures with fingers or hands, and resting one's head on a desk or hand.

Other behaviors — not answering when asked to respond, sighing, crying, and laughing.

Ongoing behaviors are the opposite of attentive behaviors, which generally include looking at you, responding to questions or instructions, sitting or standing quietly, and maintaining a neutral facial expression. Your expectations for each student engaging in these attentive behaviors will depend largely on the student's developmental level and his or her current level of skill acquisition.

Preventing ongoing behavior

Although ongoing behavior from students is virtually inevitable, your efforts should focus on preventing it. You already have learned many techniques to prepare students for Corrective Teaching. The relationships you develop with your students are strengthened by your consistent use of these various teaching methods and make it more likely that students will accept your feedback.

Preventive Teaching — A student is more likely to meet your expectations if you explain them before you do Corrective Teaching. One of the first things you should preventively teach all students is how to accept criticism and consequences. All students will receive considerable feedback each day to help them develop a better repertoire of behaviors. Teaching them how to accept criticism contributes to their future success.

Students who have difficulties accepting criticism will need frequent prompting prior to your feedback to internalize that skill.

As students begin to consistently use the skill of accepting criticism, you should begin to move from simply requiring student compliance toward teaching self-management strategies. Teaching a range of skills (disagreeing or interrupting appropriately, anger control, giving negative feedback, expressing feelings appropriately, conflict resolution, self-monitoring, and reflection) will help students "read" social situations, review their options, and choose the best response (Dowd & Tierney, 1992).

Praise — Using various forms of praise helps maintain or increase desirable behaviors and build relationships with your students. Praise is your most powerful tool to change behavior. Students who are frequently reinforced for positive behavior are less likely to act out to get your attention. If a student has a large "reinforcement reserve" (i.e. tangibles, privileges, or social reinforcers from others or himself or herself), the student is less likely to react inappropriately to a consequence or criticism. It is your responsibility to help the student develop the reinforcement reserve by noticing his or her positive behaviors and rewarding them.

Corrective Teaching — The Teaching Interaction is used when minor misbehaviors occur. Intervening early, when behaviors are "small," will help students learn your expectations and tolerances, possibly preventing escalation of inappropriate behavior.

▶ The process

Ongoing behavior can occur at any time during the Teaching Interaction, but it happens most often during these certain steps: "Description of the Inappropriate Behavior," "Consequence," "Request for Acknowledgment," and "Practice." During each of these steps, students are either receiving corrective feedback or being asked to participate in the Teaching Interaction. By knowing where ongoing behavior is most likely to occur, you can use preventive measures like prompts and praise to reduce the chances of it happening.

The following sections explain the various methods that can be used when you first respond to a student's ongoing behavior.

Helping the student regain self-control

When ongoing behavior occurs, stop the Teaching Interaction and deal with the inappropriate behaviors. The following methods are designed to help shape behavior and promote student self-control.

1. Coupling statements — These are brief descriptions of inappropriate behavior paired with descriptions of a more appropriate alternative. Example: "You're slouched in your chair. Please sit up."

Observe what the student is doing and describe the most overt or intrusive behavior. For example, if a student is arguing in a loud voice tone, waving his arms, and glaring at you, the behavior you should address is the arguing. Loud arguing is probably the most disruptive behavior, and you would have difficulty doing any further teaching until it diminishes or stops. You might say, "Instead of arguing, please be quiet."

Avoid vague or judgmental terms by keeping your descriptions specific. Use brief statements and matched behavioral pairs that include a description of both the inappropriate behavior and the appropriate alternative behavior. Avoid describing the absence of a behavior, since it doesn't give the student an alternative behavior that could replace what he or she is doing.

Example:

(Specific)

"You're tapping your pencil on the table. Please set it down."

(Nonspecific)

"That's really obnoxious. Would you stop that?"

Example:

(Brief)

"You're standing. Please sit down."

(Lengthy)

"You're standing up with your hands on your hips, shaking your head from side to side, and moving your mouth without saying anything. Please sit down, put your hands in your lap, and keep your head and mouth still."

Example:

(Matched pairs)
"You're pacing. Please stand still."

(Unmatched pairs)
"You're pacing. Please stop pacing" or "You're pacing. Please be quiet."

If you vary your word choice, you'll avoid badgering the student, which usually escalates negative behavior. Avoid overusing any one particular phrase, especially those that may set off a power struggle, such as "You need to..." or "I want you to...."

Although giving simple instructions is acceptable (e.g. "Please sit down"), coupling statements provide clear behavioral contrasts and make students more aware of what they're doing. Perhaps the most important function of a "coupling statement" is that it serves as a check on your emotions. That is, if you are focused primarily on observing and describing the student's behavior, you are less likely to react emotionally, thereby worsening the situation.

2. Specific praise — Provide the student with specific praise to reinforce any appropriate behavior you want to maintain. Praise the student for any instructions he or she follows. For example, if you ask a student, "Instead of turning away from me, would you please face me?", and he follows that instruction, you should tell him, "Thanks for turning and looking at me."

Recognizing any effort the student makes and reinforcing behavioral approximations helps the student regain self-control and maintain desired behaviors. For example, if you ask a student who is yelling to be quiet, you should praise her when she lowers her voice (e.g. "Nice job of lowering your voice.").

By praising any of the student's prosocial behaviors, you increase the likelihood that the behavior will continue or be used more frequently. Reinforcing the student's progress in regaining self-control is a key to this shaping process.

3. Rationales or "reality" statements — Rationales help students understand the benefits of following your instructions. Pointing out the positive outcomes of regaining self-control helps students make better choices about their behavior.

Example: *"If you can calm down and be quiet, we'll be able to take care of this more quickly."*

Knowing what reinforces a student and including it in your rationale also can help motivate change.

Example: *"When you look at me and answer calmly, we are more likely to finish this discussion in time for you to have lunch with your friends."*

"Reality" statements can help explain to students what you expect from them in a given situation. Many students have found through previous experience that certain behaviors, though maladaptive, get them what they want, which sometimes is to be left alone. By persisting in those behaviors, students find they can frustrate adults and achieve that goal. Adults may abandon their efforts and unintentionally reinforce the maladaptive behaviors. "Reality" statements (e.g. "We're sure not getting much accomplished this way" or "Are you really getting what you want here?") let students know you won't go away and that you will help them resolve the issue, thus breaking the cycle of reinforcement.

4. Empathy statements — A statement that lets the student know that you understand his or her situation or experiences can help de-escalate a problem behavior. Such a statement might start out like, "I know it's difficult to accept someone's criticism...." Often, simply recognizing that a student is experiencing something difficult can help alleviate some of the ongoing behavior.

5. Positive correction statements — If you issued the student a negative consequence during your Teaching Interaction, a positive correction statement may also give the student incentive to make better behavioral choices. You may want to let the student know what can be earned back by following your instructions. Simple contingency management often serves to increase desired behaviors. An example of a positive correction statement would be, "When you start following instructions, you'll begin earning back some of the recess time you lost."

Now let's put all of these steps together in an example classroom situation:

Heather is a seventh-grader who has been off task for several minutes. You asked her to get back to work, but she remained off task. You approach her and initiate a Teaching Interaction on staying on-task.

Start a Teaching Interaction

"Heather, I know this assignment may be somewhat difficult for you, but just a moment ago, you were looking around the room, tapping your pencil on your desk, and yawning."

Heather begins to argue about her behavior.

Stop the Teaching Interaction

Attempt to help the student regain control through "coupling" statements, specific praise, rationales, or "reality" statements, and empathy.

Coupling statements

"Heather, you're talking loudly. Please be quiet and listen right now."(Pause)

Praise and coupling statements

"I appreciate your looking at me and staying seated, but you're still talking loudly; please be quiet." (Pause)

Rationale

"You know, Heather, when you're quiet, we can get this taken care of a lot quicker and you can finish your essay a lot sooner." (Pause)

Empathy and coupling statements

"I know you have some concerns about your assignment, but we can't discuss them when you're yelling. Please be quiet." (Pause)

Praise

"Nice job lowering your voice, Heather. That way I know you're getting ready to calmly talk about this with me." (Pause)

"I appreciate you looking at me, and you're quiet now, too. Thanks, Heather." (Pause)

Acknowledgment

"Looks like we can finish this now, okay?"

(Heather acknowledges.)

How you use the components of this technique will depend on how a student responds. Always be aware of your own behavior — use a calm, modulated voice tone; avoid harsh, demanding instructions; pause often to allow the student to respond. You may even need to talk while the student is talking, but be careful not to "talk over" the student. If the student raises his or her voice, lower yours; the student may be influenced by your modeling, or may lower his or her voice to be able to hear you.

Avoid responding directly to demands or accusations (i.e. "getting into content") to prevent a power struggle between you and the student. Address the student's arguing by using the techniques discussed earlier in this section. Although a student may have a valid issue to discuss, addressing it now may reinforce an inappropriate way to bring up concerns with people. Consider this example: A student says, "You're so unfair! How come you like everyone else better than me?" You respond with, "I can see you have some issues you'd like to discuss with me and I'd be happy to set a time later today for us to talk (empathy). But instead of trying to talk about it now, you need to just be quiet and listen (coupling statement) so that we can finish this and move on with class (rationale)."

Continue this shaping process as long as the student demonstrates improvement. The more praise you provide for behavioral approximations, the more likely you are to see positive change. However, if the negative behaviors are escalating and you see no improvement, or the student is substituting one inappropriate behavior for another, you can begin using the office referral process that will be explained later in this chapter. Your goal is to keep the student in the classroom, if at all possible, so he or she doesn't lose instruction time.

Completing the Teaching Interaction(s)

Once you have helped the student regain self-control and have reinforced all behavioral progress with specific praise, move on to completing your teaching. Since your goal is to teach the student the skills that best meet his or her needs, assess each situation and each student individually and teach accordingly.

There are three basic ways to continue and complete your teaching once a student has regained self-control. You may choose to: 1) teach in response to the ongoing behavior and the behavior that led to the original Teaching Interaction; 2) teach in response to only the ongoing behavior; or 3) return to the original Teaching Interaction. Whatever choice you make, you must complete a Teaching Interaction that includes consequences for the behaviors you address.

If you decide to **teach in response to the original behavior and the ongoing behavior (Example 1)**, you will complete two Teaching Interactions. This decision should be based on the student's need to learn both skills and his or her ability to process this amount of information. One interaction will focus on the original skill deficit. To determine the other skill, you need to consider these factors:

1. Always note the antecedents to the ongoing behavior. For example, if the interfering behavior occurred during the "Consequence" step, you may want to teach the student how to accept a consequence or how to disagree appropriately. If the student has difficulty when you ask him or her to practice, you may teach him how to follow instructions. Teaching how to accept criticism would be the logical choice if a student engages in negative behaviors during the "Description of the Inappropriate Behavior" step.

2. It's also critical to consider the student's individual needs. Ask yourself questions like, "What skill does this student frequently have trouble with?", "What skill will provide the greatest assistance in different situations?", and "What can I teach that will allow this student to better manage his or her own behavior?" These questions will help guide your decisions, particularly with students who have progressed from needing compliance-based skills toward self-management skills.

3. Frequently, your second Teaching Interaction will be about accepting criticism or a consequence. Most ongoing behavior comes from students who are in the acquisition stage of social skills learning. In order for these students to progress to higher-level skills, they need to increase their fluency with the critical skills of "Accepting Criticism/ Consequences," and "Following Instructions."

Once you've decided to teach two skills and have determined which skills to teach, move into the Ongoing Behavior Teaching Interaction. Tell the student that you will return to the original behavior, but first you need to discuss the ongoing behavior.

Proceed with your teaching in response to the ongoing behavior just as you would with any Teaching Interaction.

(For the sake of continuity, we will continue with the example involving Heather, the seventh-grader.)

Example 1

Start the Ongoing Behavior Teaching Interaction

"Before we can talk about staying on task, Heather, we first need to discuss how you just accepted that criticism. **(Transition Statement)** *When I tried to talk to you about being off task, you argued with me."* **(Description of Inappropriate Behavior)**

"Remember, whenever someone gives you criticism, you need to look at them, say okay, and not argue." **(Description of Appropriate Behavior)**

"When you can accept criticism without arguing, you won't make the situation worse." **(Rationale)**

"Does that make sense? Tell me how you're going to accept criticism." **(Request Acknowledgment)**

Heather gives skill steps.

Now return to the original Teaching Interaction and include a preventive prompt to increase the student's chances for success at accepting the rest of your criticism/consequences.

"And you'll get another chance to practice accepting criticism because we need to finish talking about you being off task. Remember to look at me and not argue, okay?" **(Prompt)**

Complete the original Teaching Interaction sequentially.

Original Teaching Interaction

"Let's talk about staying on-task. Listen carefully to the instructions, begin working carefully, and remain focused on your work." **(Description of Appropriate Behavior)**

"That way you will probably finish your essay and not have to take it home with you." **(Rationale)**

"Let's practice staying on-task. I'm going to go over to check Tyrell's work. While I'm gone, begin working and remain focused on finishing your essay." **(Practice)**

Heather stays on-task and finishes her work.

"Alright Heather! Nice job staying on-task. You worked quietly on your essay and finished another paragraph. Way to go!" **(Feedback)**

"Because you initially had some problems staying on-task and accepting criticism, you weren't able to finish your essay in class. You'll have to take it home and finish it tomorrow. But, since you practiced both those skills so well, your essay won't be counted as late." **(Consequences)**

"Thanks for working so well with me. Since there is a couple of minutes left in class, why don't you see if you can get another paragraph done before the bell rings." **(General Praise/Redirection)**

Sometimes you may decide that the ongoing behavior represents a greater skill deficit and requires more attention than the original inappropriate behavior. In these situations, you may choose to **teach only to the ongoing behavior (Example 2)**. Previous experiences with the student, in addition to the current one, may indicate that the original issue served only as an antecedent to the "real" problem — accepting your feedback about any type of mistake. You can address the original issue at another time through a delayed practice or by using Effective Praise when the student demonstrates appropriate skill use. In Heather's example, you may notice her staying on task at another time and reinforce her use of the skill then.

Example 2

Ongoing Behavior Teaching Interaction

"Instead of talking about staying on task, it looks like we need to discuss how you accepted that criticism." **(Transition Statement)**

"Just now, when I tried to talk to you about being off task, you argued with me about it." **(Description of Inappropriate Behavior)**

"Remember that whenever you get a criticism, you should just look at the person, say 'Okay,' and not argue. Just like you're doing right now." **(Description of Appropriate Behavior)**

"Nice job, Heather. You accepted my criticism without arguing! When you can do that you have a lot more time to spend on your work. Does that make sense?" **(Rationale and Request for Acknowledgment)**

Heather acknowledges.

"Super. Since you had difficulty accepting criticism the first time about being off-task, we had to spend some time talking about the skill. So, you lost quite a bit of work time and you'll probably have to finish your assignment at home. But Heather, since you did such a nice job practicing accepting criticism, I won't count that assignment as late." **(Consequences)**

"Now, why don't you get back to your essay. It's possible you may be able to finish it before the end of class. If you need my help on anything, just raise your hand." **(General Praise/Redirection)**

Teaching in response only to the original behavior (Example 3) will probably occur when the ongoing behavior is fairly brief and of low intensity. If you can help the student regain self-control with a few prompts, cues, and/or coupling statements, simply return to and complete the original Teaching Interaction. It's a good idea to "pick up where you left off," unless that involves describing what the student did inappropriately. If you "rehash" the inappropriate behavior, you may risk inciting additional ongoing behavior. When ongoing behavior occurs at the "Consequences" step, include a preventive prompt before you return to the original Teaching Interaction. This will prepare the student to accept the consequences appropriately.

Example 3

Start a Teaching Interaction

"...but just a moment ago you were looking around the room, tapping your pencil, and yawning." **(Description of Inappropriate Behavior)**

Heather begins to argue.

"Heather, you're talking; please be quiet." **(Coupling Statement/Pause)** *"Great. You're quiet."* **(Praise)**

"Can you keep looking at me too, please?" **(Prompt)** *"Thanks, Heather for looking at me."* **(Praise)** *"I know this assignment may be difficult, but the sooner we finish discussing this, the sooner you can finish the assignment and be done with it."* **(Empathy and Rationale)**

"Instead of looking down at your feet, look up at me. That way I know you're listening." **(Coupling Statement/Rationale)** *"Nice job looking at me and following that instruction. Let's continue, okay? Remember to just look at me and say 'Okay.'"* **(Praise/Preventive Prompt)**

Continue with the Original Teaching Interaction

"Nice job Heather. Whenever you're given a task, get all the materials you need, work quietly, focus on the task until it's complete and then let me know when you're finished." **(Description of Appropriate Behavior)**

"If you can do that, you'll probably finish the work a lot quicker and move on to something you enjoy, like reading your novel. Does that make sense? Tell me how to stay on-task." **(Rationale)**

Heather acknowledges and lists steps.

"Okay, let's practice. I'm going to go and help Tyrell. While I'm over there, you'll need to practice staying on-task by finishing the paragraph you're working on right now. Okay? I'll be back in a while to see how you did." **(Practice)**

Heather practices.

"Great job staying on task! You stayed on-task and got that paragraph finished." **(Feedback)**

"Since you had trouble staying on-task, and we had to discuss and practice it, you didn't have as much time to read your novel. But because you did practice staying on-task so nicely, you don't have as much of your assignment left to do." **(Consequences)**

"Nice job. Now lets get ready to go to lunch." **(General Praise/Redirection)**

Teach the skill(s) that will be most beneficial to the student and structure your teaching to fit each individual situation. You may need to rearrange some steps to make your teaching more effective. Also, the size of the consequence is determined by the frequency and severity of the behavior. Please refer to Chapter 11, "The Teaching Interaction" for specific discussion of these concepts.

View each student individually. Teach according to each one's needs and the behavioral outcome you are trying to achieve. Don't be too rule-governed or try to follow an exact procedure with every student and situation. Behavior is not an isolated or static event; exchanges occur in a dynamic context, with each aspect related to those that precede or follow it. By recognizing behavior as an interactional, developmental process, you can modify and customize your teaching to meet the needs of all students.

▶ Ongoing Behavior Teaching Interaction into Administrative Intervention

In the first part of this chapter, you learned how to prevent or de-escalate ongoing behaviors that interfere with the learning process. When these methods are effective, students regain self-control so you can complete your teaching and they can remain in your classroom. However, there will be situations when students won't respond to your efforts. When this happens, they need to leave the classroom to receive additional, individualized attention from an administrator. (See Chapter 14, "Overview of Administrative Intervention.")

In this section, we will discuss the process of referring a disruptive student to the office. Keep in mind that **you** decide when to begin the referral process. Your decision should be based on the severity and duration of the behaviors and whether the student is showing progress toward the goal of regaining self-control.

Definition

The referral process is not a separate type of Teaching Interaction. It is not a fixed series of steps that is to be used at a designated point in time, or following a particular set of behaviors. Rather, it is a flexible teaching sequence designed to help the student recognize the severity and consequences of his or her behavior, and to provide behavioral alternatives. It includes many of the same techniques discussed earlier in this chapter, but also employs the use of consequences. The sequence is flexible because you can easily return to the original teaching agenda if a student regains self-control. The sequence is fair because you continue to communicate expectations and outcomes to a student throughout the process.

Purpose and timing

The main purpose of the referral sequence is to help the student regain self-control while continuing your teaching focus. Using clear instructions, praise, and rationales helps students understand their options and make better decisions about their behavior.

The most logical time to utilize the referral sequence is when a student displays ongoing behavior that continues or escalates during a Teaching Interaction. If, at any time, a student's behavior is perceived as dangerous to the student or others, all steps should be bypassed and the student should immediately be referred to the office. Examples of behavior that would result in an immediate referral include, but are not limited to, verbal or physical abuse or assault, major destruction of property, and being under the influence of drugs or alcohol. Your school or school district probably has a list of major offenses that result in removal of a student from a classroom. Additional discussion of types of office referral behavior is found in Chapter 14, "Overview of Administrative Intervention."

The process

Whenever you begin to discuss students' behavior with them, it is hoped that they will accept feedback and consequences without arguing, complaining, or demonstrating any other interfering behaviors. Unfortunately, this doesn't always happen. When disruptive behaviors do arise, you must deal with the ongoing behavior in order to teach needed skills. Little learning can take place if the student continues engaging in negative behaviors while you are trying to teach. Your main goal is to help the student regain control so he or she can remain in the classroom. As such, the first task is to help the student identify inappropriate behaviors and replace them with more appropriate ones. The following section explains each step in the office referral process. Examples are used to illustrate the steps.

Help the student regain self-control: Once you've recognized the student's ongoing behavior, you should provide clear descriptions of the negative behavior and alternative appropriate behaviors to help the youth make better decisions. As described earlier in this chapter, these paired statements should focus on correcting one behavior at a time. Describing too many behaviors can confuse the student and have a "badgering" effect that can escalate negative behavior. Descriptions should emphasize the behaviors that are the most overt and disruptive to your teaching at that moment. Examples include: "You're arguing. It would be better if you'd be quiet and listen"; "You have your head on your desk. I'd like you to sit up and look at me, please"; and "You're standing up. Please sit down." Coupling the inappropriate behavior with an alternative behavior lets the student know what should and shouldn't be done.

After each instruction, pause to allow adequate time for the student to respond. The pauses should be long enough to give the student a chance to calm down, but short enough that they don't reinforce inappropriate behavior. Don't expect immediate compliance; it's difficult for most people to follow instructions after they have lost self-control. Praise any approximations of desirable behaviors. These may be the specific behaviors you asked for, or any others you observe. The descriptions should be brief and specific. Let's look at an example of a situation in which the referral process is used.

Example

David is a ninth-grade student. While you're talking with him about forgetting his social studies homework, he begins to argue.

Student : David is standing by his desk, arguing loudly and pointing his finger.

Teacher: *"David, you're talking loudly. I'd like you to be quiet and listen."* (Pause)

Student: David lowers his voice, crosses his arms, turns his back to you, and continues arguing.

Teacher: *"Thanks for lowering your voice. You're continuing to talk. Please stop talking and listen."* (Pause)

Student: David continues the disruptive behaviors.

Teacher: *"It's great that you're standing still and staying right here, but you're still arguing. we could take care of this a lot quicker if you would be quiet and listen."* (Pause)

Using empathy statements and rationales, as discussed earlier in this chapter, also may help the student regain self-control. Continue using a combination of these techniques as long as the student is making progress. However, if the student's ongoing behavior continues or escalates, you'll need to move on to the next step of the process.

Give a moderate consequence: Letting the student know that he or she has earned a moderate consequence indicates the seriousness of the behavior. A moderate consequence may motivate the student to stop the inappropriate behaviors and begin engaging in more appropriate behaviors. A moderate consequence should be predetermined by the teacher, but may entail the loss of a privilege (recess time, computer use, staying after school, or a note or call home to the parents).

Give specific instructions (paired statements, empathy, or rationales): If the moderate consequence does not stop the student's ongoing behavior (and it sometimes will not), you should again provide some paired statements to help the student move toward more desirable behaviors. As mentioned before, your descriptions should focus on the most overt behaviors. If you have described one particular behavior throughout the process and the student hasn't improved that behavior, you may want to switch your focus to a different inappropriate behavior, as illustrated in the next example.

Your choice of strategies and the length of time you spend on this step will depend on what you know about the student and what you observe. Whereas paired descriptions are very helpful to one student, empathy statements or rationales may work best for another. Some students may be able to regain self-control fairly quickly, while others will demonstrate slow, but steady improvement. In general, though, unless the student is beginning to demonstrate real progress toward regaining self-control, you'll need to start thinking about how the disruption is affecting the other students in your classroom. Giving the student too much attention at this point also may serve to reinforce the student's loss of self-control.

Example

Student: David continues to stand by his desk. He turns around to face you and places his fists on his hips. He sighs loudly and begins to argue.

Teacher: *"Thanks for looking at me, David. You're standing up. Would you sit down, please?"* (Pause)

Tell the student an office referral is possible: If the student does not respond to your instructions, or escalates the inappropriate behavior, state that an office referral is possible if the ongoing behavior continues. This indicates the seriousness of the situation and what will happen if the behavior isn't stopped.

Letting students know about the consequences they will receive if they don't regain self-control helps establish a tie between the behavior and the consequences. The student should realize that he or she determines what happens next — either stop the negative behavior or earn the negative consequences. By understanding this basic concept — that they can control the outcome of a situation by controlling their behavior — students hopefully will choose to avoid the major consequence and the office referral.

Example

Student: David continues his ongoing behaviors.

Teacher: *"If you continue to argue with me and not follow my instructions, you will need to report to the office."* (Pause)

Refer the student to the office: If the student continues to behave inappropriately after you have described the possible negative consequences, he should immediately be referred to the office. Your attempts to help the student regain self-control have not been successful, so in fairness to the student and the others in your classroom, an office referral is necessary. Once in the office, the student will receive additional one-on-one attention and teaching from an administrator in order to learn better ways of dealing with problems in the classroom and other situations. (See Chapter 14, "Overview of Administrative Intervention.") The combination of teaching and consequences should help the student learn self-control and what to do to avoid an office referral in the future.

When making the actual office referral, tell the student he has earned a major consequence and to report to the office. Ask the student if he can get there on his own or if he needs assistance. The student no longer has the option of staying in your classroom, but might not get up and leave on his own. In this situation, you'll need to follow predetermined procedures for getting help. In any case, the final decision on how a student reports to the office is left to the student, giving him another opportunity to make choices about his behavior. Choosing whether to report on his own or with assistance can affect the level of consequences that go with the office referral.

Example

Student: David remains standing and continues to argue.

Teacher: *"David, for arguing and not following instructions, you need to report to the office. Can you get there by yourself, or do you need some help?"*

Once you've made the office referral, the administrator assumes the responsibility of dealing with the student's behavior until the intervention sequence is completed. Inform the office of the referral by the prearranged method (e.g. intercom, telephone, student assistant). At the same time, let the office know whether the student needs assistance.

Example

Student: David says *"Fine!"* in a loud voice and leaves your room, slamming the door on the way out.

Teacher: Calls office via intercom. *"David Rogers has been referred to the office. He's on his way."*

or

Student: David sits down in his chair, crosses his arms, looks away, and says nothing.

Teacher: Calls office via intercom. *"David Rogers has been referred to the office. He needs assistance."*

Hopefully, the student will quietly leave the classroom and report directly to the office. Should he refuse to leave the classroom, your main concern still is with your other students. Trying to teach the student additional skills at this time would be unproductive, at best. Paying attention to his refusal may only serve to reinforce that behavior and give the student an audience in front of the other students. As long as he is not disturbing others, the student may remain in your class until an administrator arrives. (Of course, this is assuming that an administrator or crisis interventionist is in the building and will arrive within minutes of the referral.)

What if the student not only refuses to leave the classroom, but also is being disruptive or destructive? In these cases, your best option is to instruct the other students to leave the classroom with you. Moving your class to the hall, media center, or multipurpose room is preferable to attempting physical restraint or allowing the out-of-control student to demonstrate such behavior in front of an "audience." Leaving the student alone may help de-escalate the youth's behavior. And, you will ensure that the rest of the class isn't at risk of getting hurt. Consequences, including any necessary compensation, should be given by the administrator during the office referral process.

▶ General considerations

When you are dealing with a student who is engaging in ongoing behavior, monitor your own behavior very carefully. It is very easy to allow yourself to get caught up in the student's words and actions. You may feel angry, agitated, or frustrated when a student is not following your instructions or accepting your feedback. Therefore, you have to be aware of your own behavior. Concentrate on keeping a calm, nonthreatening voice tone and body posture. Responding with harsh, aggressive behavior, in all likelihood, will only escalate the student's negative behavior.

A calm, quiet voice tone models your expectations and may help the youth to regain self-control. Trying to "talk over" a student results in a cycle of each person speaking louder than the other, eventually leading to a shouting match and accompanying feelings of anger. You may have to pause and take a deep breath in order to avoid the impulse to speak loudly. It also allows the student to hear, understand, and begin to comply with what you've said. Rapid-fire instructions may lead to confusion or more serious behavior by the student.

Remember that this is not a time to justify your role, explain fairness, or address the student's complaints or issues. Even though you may feel like responding to what a student is saying, don't get drawn into arguments or discussions. The easiest way to avoid this trap is to respond only to the behavior of **talking**, not to what the youth is saying. The overriding goal is to help the student calm down. Once this is accomplished, you can set a separate time for the student to discuss concerns with staff members.

There are many advantages to not arguing with a student. You'll not only avoid losing your own self-control and possibly escalating the student's behavior, but you'll also maintain your relationship with the student. You won't risk saying something hurtful or negative to the student if you keep your focus on the student's **behavior** of talking or arguing rather than on the words that are being said.

Maintain a safe, appropriate distance between the student and you. Stay at least an arm's length away; you don't want the student to feel "closed in" or physically pressured. If the student feels trapped, he or she may strike out or try to run away. Touching, in most cases, is not recommended when dealing with an agitated student. Any type of touch or certain hand gestures at this time may be perceived as aversive or threatening. Reaching out, pointing at the student, or clenching your fists may send strong, negative messages to the student. A less-threatening posture may be to keep your hands at your sides, in your pockets, or folded in front of you.

Always remember to allow a pause after you've given an instruction to the student. Pausing allows the student to hear, understand, and begin to comply with what you've said. "Rapid-fire" instructions may confuse children and may escalate their negative behaviors. Counting to yourself between instructions may help you maintain an appropriate pace.

Summary

You may find that your most powerful tool in preventing ongoing behavior is consistent teaching and recognition of a student's efforts. Clearly communicating your expectations and following up with praise and Corrective Teaching show your concern and fairness, and help build strong relationships with students. These relationships, in turn, may help students bring their behavior under control in stressful situations. At the very least, even if you are unsuccessful in helping a student remain in your class after he or she has lost self-control, the student's return to your room will be easier because your relationship with the student has remained intact.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Behavior contracting

Sometimes in your efforts to teach students social skills you may find it difficult to motivate them to change their behavior. Behavior contracting with students can be an effective method to promote behavior change as a less restrictive method than a daily token system. In fact, a contract system can be useful when fading a more frequent reward system, or for older students who still need more stringent consistencies but with less restraint.

Behavior contracting is a technique used to structure behavioral intervention by making each of the necessary elements of the process so clear and explicit that they may be written into an agreement for behavior change that is understandable and acceptable to everyone involved (DeRisi & Butz, 1975). Simply stated, a behavior contract is a structured means of exchanging positive reinforcement between two persons for fulfillment of specified responsibilities. The agreement details the requirement to be met or task to be completed, and the consequence for fulfillment of that requirement. In this chapter, we will discuss the elements of an effective behavior contract.

Behavior contracts are not just used in classrooms; they are a part of our everyday adult life. We sign contracts with employers that specify our job responsibilities and our compensation, we contract with our banks when we make a major purchase, such as buying a home or a car. When contracts are unclear, they are more difficult to abide by or sign. Imagine, for example, signing a teacher contract without knowing what your pay would be, or what the specific job expectations were. Therefore, student contracts must be governed by such behavioral principles as contingency, specificity, shaping, and positive reinforcement.

The Elements of a Behavior Contract

An effective behavior contract needs to include several key elements. They are the specification of:

1. the task to be completed
2. the performance criteria
3. the consequence

Specifying the task to be completed

Before writing the contract you must specify the task to be completed. In selecting the task, consider several things. Many times students have a multitude of problem behaviors. However, beginning with just one behavior may often affect many other behaviors that you may have wanted to remediate in the future. Consider choosing a behavior that has gone unrewarded or been punished in the past, and one that is functional for the student. That is, if the chosen behavior is performed more frequently, it will increase the student's chances of getting more of the natural kinds of rewards from the people in his or her environment. For example, helping a student speak to teachers in a socially acceptable manner may result in less criticism and increased rewards for appropriate school behavior (DeRisi & Butz, p. 10).

The behavior must be specifically described in observable, measurable terms. In order to accomplish this, you may want to ascertain where and when the behavior occurs, who is present at that time, how frequent the behavior is, etc.

The contract also must be achievable for the student. Therefore, determine at what level the student is currently performing the behavior, and set the goal at a level which can be mastered. That way the student can successfully complete the contract. You may also wish to start with a task that does not require a great deal of time to complete.

Specifying the performance criteria

Once you have selected the target behavior, write the contract jointly with the student. Remember that a contract cannot be imposed upon a student; rather, it must be agreed upon by both parties. Let the student know that the contract is open to renegotiation at any time (Rhode, Jensen, & Reavis, 1992). This allows the student to realize your availability to his or her input and demonstrates your concern about the student's perception of how the contract is working.

The contract should be stated in positive terms and indicate to what criteria the task is to be performed, e.g., how well, for what length of time, how often, etc. For example, Elvis is a seventh-grader who has difficulty completing classroom math assignments. His contract might stipulate that he needs to finish 3 out of 5 of those assignments to 80% accuracy in order to earn his specified reward: 20 minutes of time playing the computerized music program on Friday afternoon.

According to *The Tough Kid Book* (Rhode, et al., 1992) contracts should have performance criteria which specify either consecutive or cumulative requirements. Contracts which use consecutive performance criteria are the least desirable, requiring a student to perform the behavior for a specified consecutive number of days prior to receiving the consequence. They leave little room for error. On the other hand, a contract with cumulative performance criteria is optimal. It allows students to be successful because they can recover from mistakes they make and still meet their goal. In the previous example, Elvis is much more likely to be successful if assignment completion is for any 3 out of the 5 school days as opposed to 3 in a row.

Specifying the consequence

Finally, negotiate with the student regarding the consequence that can be earned. Students are much more likely to work for a reward they have the privilege of choosing. Involving children in the selection of their rewards communicates that their efforts at changing their behavior are appreciated. Many times, using children's suggestions results in establishing more fair, accurate, and rewarding contingencies, which in turn, increases the likelihood that behavior change will occur and be maintained over time (Kelley, 1990). In discussing with Elvis what would motivate him to complete his math assignments, his teacher learned that he found music to be the most reinforcing. Elvis then indicated that being able to practice his songwriting skills would motivate him to complete his math. As it worked out, the behavior and consequence were closely related. His math class was working on fractions and songwriting requires the use of fractions in the development of time signatures. Of course, if this consequence is to be truly rewarding to Elvis, it must be absolutely contingent on the behavior of completing his homework. That is, he should not have access to the privilege of working on his songwriting at any other time during the day.

Consequences must be easily attainable and neither expensive nor time consuming. Sometimes, parents wish to deliver the contingent reinforcement in the home. If you use this consequence method, you must communicate routinely with parents, either through progress notes or school notes. Regardless of where the reinforcer is delivered, the contract should have some type of tracking system to indicate what levels of achievement have been reached. A simple grid at the bottom of the contract can easily yield that information. Some contracts may include a penalty clause for not meeting the contingency, or a bonus clause for exceeding the expected criteria (Rhode, et, al, 1992). The use of penalty clauses should be limited to contracts that have been utilized and proven reinforcing to the student in the past, and/or the performance criteria has been established as accurate. An example of a penalty clause that could be included in Elvis's contract was that if he didn't complete his math classwork to the specified criteria, he would have to finish it during free time on Friday. A bonus for Elvis, such as extra time on the computerized music program, could be given for achieving higher than 85% criteria, or completing more than 3 days' assignments. After the contingencies are agreed upon, you and the student sign the contract.

Monitoring & Evaluating the Contract

Each day, the teacher and/or the student monitor and evaluate the student's progress on the contract. At the end of the contract, either the consequence is delivered, the contract is revised, or both. If a student fulfills the contract, a new one may be written for the same performance criteria or be changed to include more stringent criteria. In any case, the contract must be evaluated based on the student's performance. If a bonus was easily obtained, the criteria should modified accordingly. The same is true if the student did not achieve criteria.

If the Contract in Unsuccessful

If the student is unsuccessful meeting the criteria established in the contract, the contract may need modifications. Prior to changing the contract, there are several things to look at to improve the contract. First, make sure the student understood the contract process. If the student is confused, the behavior may not have been defined or explained clearly enough. The preventive teaching process is helpful in clarifying expectations for the student. (See Chapter 10.)

It also is important to evaluate whether the task requirement was reasonable and specific. If the student understands the process but has difficulty meeting the task requirement, smaller steps to help complete the task may need to be added. For example, as the contract now states, Elvis is expected to complete all of his math work. If that expectation is too difficult for Elvis to achieve at this time, his teacher may need to alter the criteria in order for him to achieve success. He may instead be required to complete 8 out of the 10 problems.

You also may need to examine the time frame in which you choose to write the contract. Elvis may need more frequent reinforcement than every Friday. If this is the case, the contract could be rewritten to reward Elvis for every 2 out of 3 days. Remember, behavior contracts are not as useful for students who continually need higher rates of reinforcement, e.g., students who need a token system or very young children.

Always ensure that the task requirement is not judged arbitrarily and that the student clearly understands what is required. There should be no subjectivity in determining whether or not criteria is achieved; rather, achievement of the specified goal is clearly measurable.

The success criterion must be evaluated also. The contract's goal should be attainable for the student. If it is not, the contract will be ineffective and the student will not progress. The concept of shaping should always be used when setting goals in behavior contracts. For example, a problem with Elvis's contract may be that he is currently reaching 65% with his math work; therefore, 80% may be too high for him to attain at the onset. Also, specify an amount of time in which the contract is to be fulfilled. That is, utilize cumulative performance criteria versus consecutive.

Lastly, the reinforcing value of the consequence needs to be evaluated. This pitfall is easily avoided if the student is involved in creating the behavior contract. The size of the consequence should correspond with the size of the behavior. If Elvis receives only 5 minutes of computer time for 3 hours of math work, that consequence will probably not be reinforcing enough to motivate him to fulfill the contract.

Summary

Behavior contracts can help teachers build good working relationships with seemingly unmotivated students. If contracts are clearly written, positively stated, and include student input, you can achieve success in helping students change their behavior in relatively short periods of time. The key is to start at the student's current performance level and shape to the desired goal, one step at a time.

On the following pages are sample behavior contracts.

CONTRACT

TASK

Who: *Theresa C.*
What: *turn homework in on time*
When: *3rd period English*
How Well: *2 times per week*
(2 out of 5 days)

CONSEQUENCE

Who: *Theresa C.*
What: *homework free Friday*
When: *for each 2 to 5 days*
How Much: *1 Friday*

Sign Here: *Theresa C.* Date: *11/4*

Sign Here: *Mrs. Criste* Date: *11/4*

TASK RECORD

123

CONTRACT

TASK

Who: *Bob W.*
What: *ignore other students' behavior in class*
When: *Mon - Fri. - 3rd period*
How Well: *Four days (not in a row) without "tattling" to the teacher about peer behavior*

CONSEQUENCE

Who: *Bob W.*
What: *special teacher helper to Mrs. Smith*
When: *on day 5*
How Much: *1 school day*

Sign Here: *Mrs. Smith* Date: *10/1*

Sign Here: *Bob W.* Date: *10/1*

TASK RECORD

10/2	*10/3*	*10/4*	*10/5*	*10/8*	*10/9*	*10/10*								
	wow!	—	🍎!	—	—	*YES*								
MS	*MS*		*MS*			*MS*								

CONTRACT

(I/We), ***Elvis***, hereby declare
(who)

that (I,we) will ***complete in-class math assignment***
(does what)

This job will be considered successful ***when 3 of 5 days***

assignments are completed and at 80% accuracy.
(how well)

Elvis
(signed)

For the successful completion of the above job you may

receive 20 minutes of computer time with the music program.

Date Signed ***9/26***

Date Completed

C. Nelson
(signed)

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Overview of administrative intervention

So far, you have learned techniques for dealing with ongoing or "out-of-control" behavior. However, as described in Chapter 12, you can face situations when a student can no longer stay in the classroom because of the frequency, intensity, or severity of the ongoing behavior. In these situations, the student is referred to the school office, where the principal or other staff member intervenes to help the student regain self-control. We call this process Administrative Intervention.

This chapter provides guidelines for determining when to refer a student to the office, an overview of Administrative Intervention, and an explanation of your role in the referral process.

▶ When to refer a student

The office referral process gives teachers a series of steps to follow when a student is unable to bring his or her behavior under control. This process, which was described in Chapter 12, should cover as many as 90 percent of the situations in which office referrals are necessary.

There are three main patterns of student behavior that can lead to an office referral. Two of the three are preceded by teaching; the third type results in an automatic referral.

Automatic referrals occur whenever a student commits a **major infraction of a school rule** or engages in a **serious misbehavior**, particularly one that endangers the safety of that student or others.

This type of referral should be fairly infrequent because it represents behaviors of considerable magnitude. Depending on what the student does, little or no teaching may precede the referral. Examples include fighting; possession of weapons, drugs, gang-related paraphernalia, or other contraband; major destruction of property; being under the influence of drugs or alcohol; and physical or verbal aggression that is perceived as threatening. Such aggression would include striking out at you or another student, or getting physically close to someone and directly swearing at or threatening that person. You may need to use some of the techniques for calming a student displaying ongoing behavior but most of these situations also require help from others.

Again, the frequency of automatic referrals should be fairly low. If you find you are referring students quite often because of rule infractions, you may want to spend some time evaluating your school policies to see if they are too restrictive. Certainly, major misbehaviors warrant automatic office referrals to ensure the safety and well-being of all students and staff. However, the majority of students' inappropriate behaviors should be dealt with in the classroom. An example may help illustrate this point. In some schools, any swearing by a student results in an automatic office referral. The swearing may or may not be directed at any one person. As a result, some students, given their backgrounds and other difficulties, could find themselves in the office fairly frequently. But unless the behavior (swearing) is so serious that it disrupts or endangers others in the classroom, it may be much more beneficial to use direct skill-based teaching and consequences. By keeping the student in the classroom, you have an opportunity to teach alternative behaviors and the student will not miss valuable instruction time.

The second pattern of behavior that can result in an office referral is the most common of the three types. In this case, the student is engaging in **ongoing behavior** and has been asked several times within one Teaching Interaction to begin following instructions to bring his or her behavior under control. Students most frequently are referred for ongoing behavior related to not following instructions, or not accepting criticism or consequences. Although the ongoing behavior could vary significantly in intensity, duration, and variety, it is not perceived as a threat to the safety of the student or others. Therefore, the teacher has the opportunity to teach alternative behaviors before referring the student to the office for additional help. Chapter 12, "Ongoing Behavior," includes techniques for helping a student regain self-control.

The third pattern of behavior resulting in an office referral is **minor misbehavior over time**. These frequent problem behaviors, which require repeated teaching, may occur many times during a single day or class period, or may continue over many days. When using the office as a "back-up" or increased consequence for repeated minor misbehaviors, remember these points:

1. The skill level of the individual student will, in part, determine your use of this office referral option. Although you may choose to refer a student whom you know has appropriate skills but lately has

demonstrated repeated minor difficulties such as not having proper school materials or frequently giving criticism to others. On the other hand, a newer or lesser skilled student may not be referred for these same behaviors. These students most likely have many other target behaviors that need improvement, and these would take precedents over some of the higher-level "fine tuning"skills. In other words, you should choose consequences and strategies that are in the best interests of each student, based upon his or her skill levels and needs. Otherwise, you may find yourself making too many referrals or falling back on your largest consequences for a variety of misbehaviors.

2. Students should be told that an office referral is probable for continued difficulties. If the behavior continues over time, even with repeated teaching and consequences, you need to let the student know that the situation is becoming serious and that the next step will be an office referral unless some behavioral changes are made. For example, you have talked with a student for the fourth time during one class period about making inappropriate comments. Since the misbehavior is continuing, you feel that the teaching and consequences you've used have been ineffective. At this point, you may tell the student something like, "I need to let you know that if you make any more inappropriate comments to other students during this class period, you'll be referred to the office." This lets the student know what you expect of him or her and what will happen if misbehavior continues.

3. In general, this type of office referral is reserved for one behavior that occurs over time. Infrequently, however, you may tell a student that he or she will be referred to the office for engaging in any of a variety of inappropriate behaviors. This usually occurs when a student begins engaging in a inappropriate behavior as soon as you've finished a Teaching Interaction on a different skill. If this pattern occurs, you may need to increase the in-class consequences or tell the student that any other inappropriate behaviors will result in an office referral. Also, you should check your own behavior by assessing your tolerances for ongoing behavior. It may be that while you're teaching the student, he is doing things that indicate he is not accepting your feedback. Unchecked, these behaviors may escalate or result in "limit-testing" by the student. That is, a student may continue to engage in minor inappropriate behaviors to see how far he can go before you respond.

▶ The Administrative Intervention process

The Administrative Intervention process involves joint efforts and cooperation between the teacher and administrator. The main goal of the process is to help the student regain self-control and to teach alternative behaviors to replace those which resulted in the child's removal from the classroom. Although the immediate teaching agenda focuses on what happened in the classroom, the long-range goal is to teach skills that the student can use to control his or her behavior under any conditions, thereby avoiding negative outcomes such as office referrals, fights, or damaged relationships.

In addition to skill-based teaching, the process allows administrators and teachers to concentrate on building trusting, caring relationships with students. The teaching focus helps students understand that teachers and administrators are genuinely concerned about them, and that the students' behavior, not the students themselves, are at issue.

Step one: Helping the student obtain self-control

After a teacher makes an office referral, the student chooses to report in one of two ways: "in crisis" or "under partial compliance." Preferably, a student will choose to leave the classroom quietly and immediately. If the student goes to the office, is relatively quiet, and follows instructions, but still displays some negative behaviors, he or she is considered "under partial compliance." However, if the student chooses to remain in the classroom following the referral, does not report directly to the office, or reports to the office but is unable to sit quietly, he or she is "in crisis."

The administrator who is working with the student will use a variety of techniques to help the student regain self-control. The goal of this part of the process is to have the youth sit quietly in an assigned place where the student and the administrator can talk. The student also promises to stay in his or her seat while the administrator goes to visit the teacher who made the office referral. The techniques used in the office are similar to those used when dealing with ongoing behavior:

1. Praise — Specific descriptions of a student's progress toward regaining self-control can help the student calm down. Praise is the first thing a student should hear from the administrator upon reporting to the office following a referral. For example, the administrator may say, "Thanks for coming to the office right away." Praise also is used when a student follows specific instructions or approximates desirable behavior.

2. Coupling statements — Using paired descriptions of behavior emphasizes appropriate alternatives to the student's current behavior. An example is, "You're talking. Please be quiet and listen."

3. Simple instructions — Giving simple instructions gives the student options for appropriate behaviors. Examples include, "Please sit down," and "Lower your voice, please."

4. Empathy — Students in crisis often need to know that someone understands their feelings and struggles. By using empathy statements such as "I know this is difficult," or "I understand that you're upset," the administrator can help de-escalate the student's behavior. Empathy statements are often paired with rationales.

5. Rationales — "Process-oriented" rationales are most frequently used during a crisis situation. Statements such as, "The sooner you can quiet down and listen, the sooner we can resolve your issues," let students know that regaining self-control can result in positive outcomes for them.

6. Physical monitoring — While talking with the student, the administrator should be relaxed and move slowly, keeping a safe and comfortable distance from the student to avoid escalating the negative behavior. The goal is to help the student regain control to the point that he or she is able to sit quietly.

Generally, administrators should not block the student's path or restrain the student in any way since physical restraint and management most often escalate behavior. If a student chooses to leave the office area, the administrator should move aside, then follow the student within the school building. In situations where the student might be in danger by leaving the building, an administrator may need to follow or physically keep the student inside. Some schools are near busy streets or highways, and some children may not understand the danger of running out of the building into the street. Administrators should continue to follow set policies about students who leave the school building without permission, but should also be prepared to use physical techniques to keep students safe. The National Crisis Prevention Institute in Madison, Wisconsin is one organization that can provide training and information about physical management. Decisions as to the appropriateness of these techniques are left to the trained individual.

The administrator works with the student, using a combination of these techniques, until the student is relatively quiet and sitting in the designated spot. At this point, the administrator asks for a verbal commitment from the student that he or she will stay seated in the chair the whole time the administrator is gone. Getting this commitment is necessary for the process to continue, as it represents a "trust bond" between the student and administrator. If the student is not ready to give that commitment, the administrator will not leave. Rather, the administrator will continue working with the student, pointing out continued progress toward the goal, rationales for the process, and potential outcomes of the student's behavior.

The way the administrator asks for the verbal commitment is very important. The wording should specifically ask for the student to stay seated the entire time the administrator is out of the office. By clearly stating this expectation, and having the student agree to it, the administrator can avoid problems that may occur in his or her absence. Consider the potential differences in a student's behavior by changing a few words when gaining a verbal commitment: "I need to know you'll be in this chair when I get back," versus "I need to know that you'll remain seated the entire time I'm gone, and that you'll be here when I get back." Asking the student to stay seated the whole time the administrator is gone does not ensure anything, of course, but it does leave the responsibility and choice of behavior with the student.

If the administrator has any concerns about leaving the student alone in the office because of safety issues, the child would not be left unattended. Rather, another adult would monitor the student during this period of time. Depending on the student's level of compliance, it may be easier to move an adult near the student than to have the student move closer to an available adult.

Step two: Checking with referring teacher

After the student agrees to remain seated, the administrator leaves the office and meets with you (the referring teacher). At that time, the administrator fills out an office referral form (Figure 1) with the information necessary to accurately complete the intervention process. If possible, you should jot some quick notes following the referral so you can provide specific details of your interaction with the student. This information helps the administrator focus on appropriate alternative behaviors to replace those that led to the office referral.

You should be prepared to respond to a number of questions about the referral:

1. Antecedent events — What circumstances surrounded the behavior? Who was involved? Where and when did this occur?

2. Behavioral responses — What did the student do or say? How severe was the behavior? How often does this type of behavior occur? Has it happened frequently in the past?

3. Consequences — How did you intervene? What type of teaching did you attempt? Were any consequences delivered?

4. Additional information — What else can you add to help the administrator work with the student?

The administrator uses this information to determine the type of referral **(serious misbehavior/major rule infraction, ongoing behavior, or minor misbehavior over time)** and the skills to teach during the intervention process. The administrator then returns to the office and begins working with the student.

Step three: Intensive Teaching

Upon returning to the office, the administrator should praise the student for staying seated and for anything else the student has done appropriately. If it appears that the student did not stay seated during the administrator's absence (for example, items missing or askew), appropriate consequences for the behavior are given later in the intervention process.

The administrator's goal during Intensive Teaching is to de-escalate the student's disruptive behavior to a point where the student can once again follow instructions. Hopefully, the time the administrator was away has helped the student gain additional self-control. However, if the student continues with partial compliance, the administrator consistently uses the techniques described earlier to help the student achieve this level during Intensive Teaching.

During Intensive Teaching, the administrator shapes the student's behavior using coupling statements, specific praise, empathy, and rationales — the same techniques you use when dealing with ongoing behavior and the administrator uses when de-escalating a crisis situation. The administrator works with the student until he or she displays behaviors that indicate a readiness to follow instructions and accept feedback. Acceptable behaviors include being quiet, paying attention, and sitting up straight.

Figure 1

Office Referral

STUDENT ________________ CLASS/TIME ____________________ REFERRED BY ________________

CIRCLE ONE:

MAJOR MISBEHAVIOR/
INFRACTION OF SCHOOL RULE

CONTINUED MINOR MISBEHAVIOR
OVER TIME

FAILURE TO ACCEPT
CRITICISM/CONSEQUENCES

SPECIFIC DESCRIPTION OF PROBLEM BEHAVIOR:

TEACHER INTERVENTION(S):

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS:

Step four: Teaching Interaction

Once the student is displaying appropriate behavior, the administrator starts a Teaching Interaction on the referral behavior. The Teaching Interaction follows the same steps as the one you have learned, but may include extra practices, more discussion, and some problem-solving.

Consequences for the office referral and any other outstanding contracts are given within the context of the Teaching Interaction. If the student's behavior resulted in any other consequences during the office intervention (e.g. damaging the office, prolonged out-of-control behavior), these also are given at this point. In addition to assigned consequences and potential restitution, each office referral requires notification of parents, an apology to the referring teacher, and completion of all missed classroom assignments.

Throughout the teaching process, the administrator works hard to maintain a sense of fairness and understanding, while helping the student learn better ways to handle difficult situations in the classroom. One goal of the process is to preserve and strengthen the teacher-student relationship; that is, during the intervention, the administrator supports the teacher's decisions while also attending to the student's issues. If an administrator has concerns about the appropriateness of the referral, he or she will talk with the teacher at a separate time.

After all consequences have been delivered, the administrator can allow the student to discuss problems or feelings related to the office referral. At this point, the student has successfully completed the office intervention (except for the apology) and should be able to discuss concerns and feelings rationally. The student and administrator may spend some time problem-solving, working through issues that may have contributed to classroom difficulties, or talking about the student's "side" of the referral. By delaying discussion until this time, the student probably will be more successful in conveying concerns appropriately.

Step five: Prepare and practice apology

The student and the administrator work together on the apology to the referring teacher. The administrator asks questions and helps the student formulate an appropriate apology. A number of practices follow to ensure that the student will be successful when delivering the apology to the teacher. Practices also help the student accept responsibility for his or her own behavior by emphasizing the response chosen by the student. When the administrator feels reasonably confident that the student can successfully make the apology, he or she will return to your classroom to update you on the student's progress and determine if this is a good time for the student to return and give the apology.

Step six: Check with the teacher

When the administrator returns to your classroom, he or she will talk to you about the office intervention and the upcoming apology.

The administrator also will discuss strategies for helping the student return to class successfully. He or she will let you know that the consequences associated with the referral were taken care of, and that no further mention of them is necessary. Reminding the student about negative behavior could result in repeated problems, whereas praise for appropriate behavior will increase the student's chances for successfully returning to class. The administrator may ask about the classwork the student missed while in the office, and encourage the student to talk with you about it.

Step seven: Student delivers apology

After you and the administrator have determined when the student should make the apology, the administrator and student will return to your classroom together. Before returning, however, the administrator probably will have the student practice the apology one more time.

You will be asked to step outside the classroom so the student can apologize away from other students. The administrator will determine whether the apology is acceptable because he or she has been working with the student and has set the expectation level for the student. If the apology does not meet these expectations, the administrator will take the student back to the office for additional teaching and practice. If the apology is acceptable, the administrator will make a statement of approval (e.g. "Nice job, Jan."), or will ask the student if he or she is ready to return to class. You can then welcome the student back to your class and provide immediate praise for some aspect of the student's behavior.

Following up with frequent praise is also important. By praising the student's efforts, you'll help him or her learn about maintaining relationships even in the face of conflict. Your attention to positive behaviors also communicates that you recognize the attempts the student is making to start anew.

Summary

You have a crucial role in determining the success of the Administrative Intervention process. The following summarizes your main responsibilities.

1. Consistently maintain low tolerances for inappropriate behaviors and teaching methodologies.

2. Notify appropriate personnel when you have referred a student to the office. Know the proper procedures for notifying the office (e.g. use of intercom, telephone, teacher assistant, or student).

3. Be prepared to clearly describe the antecedent events and student behavior that led to the office referral. Take quick notes following the referral if that will help you be more accurate.

4. Be prepared to provide information about any classwork the student misses. This will ensure that the student is accountable for all assignments.

5. Be ready to accept the student back into your class and to reinforce the apology. You may not always feel ready to have the student back, but the student should be allowed to return following successful

completion of the Administrative Intervention process. You can share your specific concerns with the administrator at the time he or she checks back with you (Step Six), but the administrator makes the final determination about the student's return to the classroom.

6. After the student returns, reinforce any positive behaviors and efforts. The tone and quality of your interactions may well determine how successful the students reintegration into your classroom is.

Working with parents

One of the goals of the Educate America Act states that by the year 2000 every school will promote partnerships that will increase parental involvement and participation in promoting the social, emotional and academic growth of children (U.S. Department of Education, 1993). The objectives of this goal include, but are not limited to, schools actively engaging families in shared educational decision-making and families holding schools and teachers to high standards of accountability. The school is responsible for building relationships with parents before problems with students arise. This chapter will provide teachers with ways to engender sound working relationships and foster good communication with parents.

The 1991 Council for Exceptional Children Conference in Atlanta established that in the 1990's we can expect to see more of the following: working mothers, latchkey children, cultural and economic diversity, children in poverty, families with special needs children, homeless families, and children in extended day care. Schools are increasingly charged with the responsibility of providing extended use of their facilities to serve children and their families, particularly those at risk. Often, these parents have had negative relationships with schools as students themselves. Thus, they come to their children's schools with preconceived negative expectations. This is exacerbated by the tendency toward bi-directional negative relationships between parents and teachers, particularly when the children are difficult or have special needs. The focus then becomes one of assigning blame rather than finding the best way to help the child. Teacher's low expectations of parents can be an important obstacle to change.

When faced with overwhelming problems, such as those outlined at the CEC Conference, parents are little concerned with engaging in teacher-pleasing behaviors. On the other hand, teachers are pressured to involve parents without adequate resources or time to do so. Few have had the supplemental education to work with parents, nor is it part of their contractual obligations (Betty Phillips Center for Parenthood Education, 1992).

Children spend 6 to 10 hours a day in school and/or extended care programming. Therefore, schools have become responsible for teaching not only academics, but addressing social and emotional issues as well. Without engendering parental support, schools will most likely fail in their efforts to teach children generalizable skills. Parents are their children's first teachers, having taught hundreds of skills before a child enters his first year of school. Obviously, they have the most vested interest in the success or failure of their children. All parents have hopes and goals for their children; they differ in how they support their children's efforts to achieve those goals.

The outcome that teachers glean from developing positive relationships with parents is the ability to provide the best education possible to the students in their charge. In order to achieve that goal, teachers must find methods in which they can develop rapport and build a team relationship with students' families. Parents must also be educated about the school program through teachers' efforts to share information.

Schools tend to take a narrow approach to parent involvement by focusing on one kind of activity, e.g., parent workshops or a homework hotline (Burch & Palanki, 1994). There must, however, be a varied range of involvement options available to parents that can be tailored to their and their children's individual needs and characteristics. These opportunities should be developmentally appropriate and consistent with the structure, routine, and resources of the school program. Administrators need to ensure that adequate resources are available for work with parents and that teachers are recognized and reinforced for positive interactions with parents (Smallwood, Hawryluk, & Pierson, 1990). Currently, the most common methods used by teachers to communicate with parents are calling on the telephone, holding conferences, and sending notes. These approaches as well as suggested others will be discussed.

▶ Telephone calls

The initial contact with parents sets the stage for all ensuing contact. Being positive and showing interest and enthusiasm, increases the likelihood that parents will engage in reciprocal behavior. It is best to develop open lines of communication before problems arise, i.e., contact that is initiated at the beginning of the school year. This phone call provides a link and helps parents feel connected to you and the school. It is advisable to ask for the parent's input regarding such things as the child's reinforcers, past experiences, personality, talents, and things to avoid (Kuykendall, 1992). If school is already under way, you may want to spend some time noting the child's strengths. This becomes especially critical when a learning history of negative contacts from teachers has been established for the student in prior grades. Phone calls to parents to share concerns about children's learning or behavior are often unavoidable but they should neither be the first contact made with parents nor the only contact parents have with you. Many parents complain that they only hear about the negative things that their children do. Often, by the time they do receive such a report, the problem is relatively long-standing (Kelley, 1990). The 4:1 positive to negative interaction ratio you use with students should hold true for communication with parents as well. Keeping a phone log is an easy way for you to evaluate the frequency and type of calls made. When concern calls are made, there should be a "no fault" emphasis in interactions; the focus should be on how you and the parents can work together to increase the child's success. Any attempts at positive student performance should be noted at the beginning of the call and the conversation should end on a positive note.

Sometimes it's difficult for parents and teachers to reach one another because of differing schedules or other logistical issues. Many school programs are trying innovative approaches such as the TransParent School Model (Betty Phillips Center for Parenthood Education, 1992). This model recommends the use of answering machines and voice mail to increase bi-directional contact. It can encompass behavior reports, upcoming school activities, or homework assignments. Parents can call as their schedules permit. The convenience factor has increased contact from parents to the schools who advocate its use.

▶ Conferences

The productive relationships that teachers build with parents provide children with greater consistency in the two most important environments in their lives, thereby increasing opportunities for learning and growth. Stephens and Wolf (1980) recommend a four-step sequence for parent-teacher conferences to maximize the outcome of the meeting.

The first step is building rapport with the parents. Speaking positively about the student conveys a caring attitude. It's best to spend a few moments engaging in small talk to break the ice and to set the stage for a conversation among adult equals.

Second, obtain pertinent information from the parents. Questions such as, "What has Alex told you about?" should open the door for the parents to share information or concerns. Be willing to take some time to discuss the parents' goals for their child throughout the conference.

Third, provide specific information about what the child is doing in school and share samples of his or her work. It is important to share the student's strengths even within an area that requires further development.

Fourth, summarize what was said and discuss any follow-up activities. Parents should also leave the conference with a copy of everything that was discussed.

Your behavior during the conference will greatly determine its outcome. There are several considerations that will enhance the potential for a successful conference. It usually is best to assume that the parents know the most about the child and his or her needs. Always consider the parents' perspective when discussing what you think is best for the child. If making suggestions, start with something which parents can be successful, and do not be defensive or intimidated if they disagree. Rather, ask for alternatives and be willing to compromise, but also be willing to take a youth advocacy stance on discipline and child protection issues. Most importantly, speak in plain and jargon-free language that is common to both parties to avoid the appearance of being a "teacher expert". If the parents speak another language, an interpreter will be necessary.

Notes

Report cards are sent home too infrequently for parents to have an accurate picture of how their children are faring routinely at school, hence more frequent contact is warranted if the goal is to keep parents informed and to prevent small problems from mushrooming. Written contacts from school can take many forms — from something as simple as a "happy gram" to more complex newsletters and individualized school notes and progress charts.

Class newsletters that go home regularly are of benefit because they inform parents of everything from curriculum and class activities to upcoming events and even the school lunch menu. In classrooms where a social skill curriculum is being taught, a social skill of the week can be identified and noted in the newsletter. The steps to the skill can be listed and parents can practice with their child at home in order for the student to generalize the skill. When skills taught at school parallel those taught at home, the overall result is better for the student.

Other methods of keeping parents informed may be through the use of a monthly calendar which notes upcoming events or notes when items are needed for school. It may be helpful to develop a handbook for parents on how they can help the class or school. There should be a full range of items included.

School/home notes are useful when daily contact is warranted due to a student's ongoing behavioral or academic problems. The note is a two-way communication device which serves as a daily "report card" on the student's activities. The frequency of feedback that both you and the parents receive is maximized and issues can be dealt with quickly which enhances your overall effectiveness. You can benefit from the parents' information on what skills the students have and what skills need to be taught, while parents can provide extra practice on skills at home and teach new ones.

The school note functions best as part of a "contract" contingency with rewards for school behavior being given at home based on classroom task completion or other predetermined criteria. Parents have more time and resources at their disposal as well as the strongest relationship with the child in general, thus it stands to reason that they can place the most powerful contingencies on the child with the best chances for skill generalization (Kelley, 1990).

Communication among parents and the school staff is critical if a school note program is to succeed. A school note program should not be initiated without parental involvement or consent, or all may be for naught; in fact, a teacher may be viewed as punitive. When teachers and parents do meet to determine the goals of the school note, it is important to keep the focus narrow and to concentrate on one to three behaviors at a time. The teacher should be apprised of what reinforcers and consequences are associated with the note. The teacher is then responsible for filling out the note contingently and consistently, always noting more positive than negative behaviors. Any design may be used as long as it is easy to read, specific, and quick to fill out. Sample school notes are shown in Figures 1 and 2.

Parental involvement is more than helping students at home. The notion of parents as teachers holds great promise and may take many forms, including school tutors and classroom volunteers. Parents often have many unique abilities that can be tapped for educational purposes, but the school must first be an inviting environment in order to stimulate interest. Parents should be involved with the school community on all levels, e.g., decision- making teams, district-wide committees, room parents, parent- teacher organizations, etc. In order to inform parents of what is available, it's best to encourage them to come to the school freely. Having activities such as curriculum nights, sharing school lunch with their children, and open classroom policies encourage visits from the parents.

The school as a community building is a concept gaining more popularity and attention, as well as the teacher visiting the students' homes. Surveying parents about the ways they would like to be involved in the school program is probably the best method of determining how they would like their needs to be met. A sample survey can be found in Figure 3 (Lyons, Robbins, & Smith, 1983).

A recommended practice for all school programs is the use of self-evaluation to determine if the community's needs are being met. Conducting parent consumer questionnaires can provide schools with much needed feedback from the parents' perspective and improve community relationships as a result. Figure 4 is a sample parent consumer questionnaire.

Teachers must have a community-oriented spirit if working with parents is to be a positive experience, and that spirit begins by having a positive and open attitude with the children in the classroom. It is of great benefit to teach a unit on how people differ early in the year and to model the appreciation of others' unique properties. Difference is not merely viewed as a cultural agenda but also that of family structures (Olson, 1994). When individuals do not acknowledge differences, they tend to evaluate others based on the dominant culture's standards instead of interpreting behavior based on a family's values and priorities. Decisions about what is best for a child may be made on inaccurate or biased information (Sontag, & Schacht, 1994). However, when differences are taught as strengths, intercultural parity results, and in the classroom "family" each student becomes equal in value.

Figure 1 (front)

School Note

NAME ______________________________ DATE ____________________

(Teachers please initial all entries)

Class	Responsible Behaviors	Irresponsible
Behaviors		
1		
2		
3		
4		
5		
6		
7		

Target Behaviors:

1. Follows instructions
2. Obtains permission
3. Uses greeting skills
4. Accepts criticism
5. Uses appropriate language
6. Stays on task
7. Completes assignments
8. Participates in class
9. Arrives on time
10. Volunteers
11. Personal appearance
12. Has necessary supplies
13. ____________________
14. ____________________

Period	Homework Assignment	T.I.
1		
2		
3		
4		
5		
6		
7		

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Figure 1 (back)

School Staff Comments

This student did well in the following areas... (Include items of **EXTRA EFFORT** in both social and academic areas.) Please initial.

____
____
____
____
____
____
____
____
____
____

We need to help the student improve in the following areas... (Include major social and academic problems, and any referrals to the Principal.) Please initial.

____
____
____
____
____
____
____

Additional information (for use by parents and school staff).

____
____
____
____

Figure 2

Cindy's School Note

Date: ____________ **Mon.** **Tues.** **Wed.** **Thurs.** **Fri.**

My Behavior	During School	After School
I kept my hands and feet to myself.	yes ___ no ___	yes ___ no ___
I worked hard on my schoolwork and stayed on task.	yes ___ no ___	yes ___ no ___
I talked respectfully to my teachers and followed their instructions.	yes ___ no ___	yes ___ no ___
My teacher's initials:	____________	____________
Any other comments:		

Figure 3

Parent Involvement Program Survey

Name ______________________________ Phone ______________

Address ____

Children in School(s)

Name of Child	**Age**	**School**

I would like to learn more about:

___ things I can do to help my child in school.
___ how to help in the school and classroom.

I would be interested in:

___ just getting to know more parents in the community.
___ being in a fun group that gets me out of the house.
___ craft classes.
___ learning more about what's going on in the community for me and my family.

If a group of parents got together, I would like to talk about:

___ ways to talk and listen to my children and work out problems.
___ ways to get my children to do what they need to do.
___ ways to manage so that my children get good food and health care.
___ ways to feel more comfortable talking with teachers, counselors, doctors, nurses... all the people who work with my children.
___ ways to deal with living in a community of many different cultures and a chance to learn more about each other.
___ ways to deal with my children about big things like life, death, love, sex, work, responsibility, education, money, trust, honesty, prejudice, drugs, alcohol, etc.

I could go to meetings:

___ in the morning.
___ in the afternoon.
___ in the evening.
___ on weekends.

I think the best place for parents to get together is:

___ in a home.
___ at the school.
___ community center/library.
___ other: ______________

Return this form to your child's teacher by: ____________________

From Lyons, Peggy, Robbins, AL & Smith, Allen. (1983). *Involving Parents: A Handbook for Participation in Schools* pp. 168-69

Figure 4

Parent Interview

School: ______________________________ Date: ______________

Please use the following scale to indicate your level of agreement with the statements listed below.

7 = Strongly Agree
6 = Agree
5 = Slightly Agree
4 = Neither Agree nor Disagree
3 = Slightly Disagree
2 = Disagree
1 = Strongly Disagree

1. My child's teacher is friendly and pleasant to talk with. ______

Comments:

2. My child's teacher is concerned and wants my child to do well in school. ______

Comments:

3. My child is treated fairly by teachers and administrators. ______

Comments:

4. I've been kept well informed about my child's progress at school. ______

Comments:

5. My child's teacher expects students to behave well in class. ______

Comments:

Figure 4 (continued)

6. My child's teacher runs a well controlled classroom where learning can occur. ______

Comments:

7. The discipline used at school is effective in helping to change behavior. ______

Comments:

8. When my child has difficulty, his/her teacher is aware and provides special help. ______

Comments:

9. My child is learning important social skills and behavior (such as following instructions, disagreeing appropriately, etc.) which will help him/her later in life. ______

Comments:

10. My child is making nice progress in his/her behavior at school. ______

Comments:

11. My child likes his/her teacher and enjoys going to school. ______

Comments:

12. My child is making nice progress with his/her school work. ______

Comments:

Roadblocks to parent involvement

Teachers may have the best intentions to help children succeed in school and in fact may have put forth a great deal of effort to involve parents and keep them informed. Sometimes our best efforts are to no avail due to family problems over which we have no control. Some of those problems and suggestions are detailed as follows.

1. Apathy: When it appears that parents have given up on their children and make statements to that regard, it is important to say and do things that model hopefulness. The teacher can also make an impact by reinforcing any enthusiasm or interest and by asking questions or making comments which may bring out positive responses.

2. Unreliable parents: The best approach with parents who seem to be unreliable is to use preventive and educational methods. That is, let parents know what you need, and when and why you need it. Prior to labeling a parent as unreliable, however, efforts should be made to determine if there is an underlying reason. Often, jobs and finances may preclude classroom volunteering or conference attendance, which may be misread as disinterest (Olson, 1994). Parents may also have a lack of transportation or child care. Teachers must be available to alternative solutions if this is the case, such as meeting with the parents at their homes or holding telephone meetings. Some parents who have had negative school experiences may not feel welcome or they may feel intimidated. When individuals feel they have nothing to contribute, it is difficult for them to be motivated. It is important to be welcoming and reinforcing and offer parents meaningful roles with which they are comfortable. Language barriers may also prevent involvement; therefore, every effort to communicate in a parents' first language should be made.

3. Hostile and uncooperative parents: When faced with an angry person it is imperative to remain calm and professional. Emphasizing a problem-solving mode of thinking while expressing empathy may defuse the situation, but the meeting may need to be brought to a close and an administrator may need to be present at any subsequent meetings for mediation purposes. Teachers should always self-check their behavior and ask for feedback if warranted. Telling parents that their input is valued may help as well. If it is determined that the parent is intoxicated, do not try to reason with them, but end the conversation tactfully and as quickly as possible. Do not get into a situation that is potentially physically threatening. Ask for administrative assistance.

4. Severe personal problems of parents: This is a difficult area to change due to the lack of control that teachers have over parents' behavior. Resist the caution to act as a counselor except to refer parents to a school social worker who may be able to tell them about public and private agencies that are able to provide services. The full service school where families can receive appropriate intervention is perhaps not far down the road. Even though teachers are not therapists, the children should be given as much empathy and support as is warranted.

5. Abusive and neglectful parents: When discovered, abuse and neglect must be reported to the appropriate state agencies. To ensure that the school is a safe environment for children, policies and procedures should be followed to the letter.

Summary

Schools and teachers have been charged with the responsibility of increasing parental involvement in their programs. It is agreed that children simply do better when their parents are involved, but both adult factions are faced with limited time and resources with which to get the job done. If we are to improve the quality of education for children in the 21st century, we must overcome some of the seemingly insurmountable barriers. As is stated in an African proverb, "It takes an entire village to raise a child."

Social skills for special education/ young students

Following instructions

1. Look at the person.
2. Say "Okay."
3. Do it now.
4. Check back.

Accepting criticism

1. Look at the person.
2. Say "Okay."
3. Don't argue.
4. Think about what you learned.

Accepting "No"

1. Look at the person.
2. Say "Okay."
3. Stay cool.
4. If you don't agree, ask later.

Greeting others

1. Look at the person.
2. Use a nice voice.
3. Say "Hi."

Getting the teacher's attention

1. Look at the teacher.
2. Raise your hand.
3. Wait until the teacher says your name.
4. Use a nice voice.

Asking for what you want

1. Look at the person.
2. Use a nice voice.
3. Say "please," and tell what you want.
4. Say "Thank you."
5. Or accept "No."

Disagreeing

1. Look at the person.
2. Use a nice voice.
3. Tell how you feel.
4. Give a reason.
5. Listen to the other person.

Giving criticism

1. Look at the person.
2. Use a nice voice.
3. Say something positive first.
4. Say what you don't like.
5. Listen.

Saying "No"

1. Look at the person.
2. Say "No, I don't want to."
3. Leave the situation.

Saying you're sorry

1. Look at the person.
2. Use a nice voice.
3. Tell why you're sorry.
4. Don't make excuses.
5. Say what you'll do next time.

Talking with others

1. Look at the person.
2. Use a nice voice.
3. Ask questions.
4. Let others talk.

Giving compliments

1. Look at the person.
2. Smile.
3. Use a nice voice.
4. Tell what you like.

Accepting compliments

1. Look at the person.
2. Use a nice voice.
3. Say "Thank you."

Offering to help

1. Look at the person.
2. Use a nice voice.
3. Ask if you can help.
4. Check back when you are done.

Reporting to the teacher

1. Look at the teacher.
2. Stay cool.
3. Ask to talk to the teacher alone.
4. Tell what you saw.
5. Answer the teacher's questions.
6. Say "Thank you."

Introducing yourself

1. Look at the person.
2. Smile.
3. Use a nice voice.
4. Say your name.
5. Shake hands.
6. Say, "It was nice to meet you."

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Index

A

ABC pattern, 33-36
abusive parents, 143
accepting
  criticism, 52, 98, 145
  "no" for an answer, 52, 145
acknowledgment, requesting, 74, 90
action verbs as describers, 58
activity oriented reinforcer, 40
administrative intervention, 7-8, 106-110, 121-130
advantages, 28-29
AIDS, students with, 15
Alberto, P.A., 40, 147
Anderson, L., 78, 147
anonymity, 11
answering machines, 133
antecedent events, 126
antecedents, 34
apathy, 142
apology, making an, 53, 128-129
applied
  behavior analysis, 5
  consequences, 35
appropriate behavior, description of, 74, 89-90
approximations, successive, 40-41
asking for what you want, 145
Aspy, D., 19, 147
attentive behavior, 98
automatic referral, 121-122
avoidance/avoidance, 44

B

back-up reinforcer, 40
Baker vs. Owen, 13
Bandura, A., 5, 19, 147
Baron, R.L., 3, 147, 148
Bastien, J., 7, 149
Becker, W., 21, 77, 147
behavior
  absence of, 58
  analysis, applied, 5

  attentive, 98
  contracts, 113-120
  contracts, elements of, 114-117
  definition of, 34
  describing, 58-61, 74
  observing, 57-58
  ongoing, 97-112, 122
  out-of-control, 97-112
  principles of, 33-47
behavioral shaping, 40-43
  definition of, 40
behavioral terms chart, 37
benefits rationale, 64-65
Bethel vs. Fraser, 14
Betty Phillips Center for Parenthood Education, 132-133, 147
bi-directional contact, 133
Black, D.D., 6, 7, 64, 149
Bluestein, J., 72, 147
Board of Education vs. Rowley, 14
body movements, 57, 98
bonus clause, 115
Borich, G.D., 3, 147
Boys Town Education Model, 1-8, 50
  components of, 5-8
Boys Town Family Home Program, 3
Boys Town Social Skills Curriculum, 51-56
Braswell, L., 24, 150
Braukman, C.J., 65-66, 72, 148, 152
Braukman, P.D., 66, 148
Bronfenbrenner, U., 19, 148
Brophy, J., 2, 68, 148, 151
Brown, L.J., 7, 149
Burch, P., 132, 148
Bush, Robert, 19, 148
Butz, G., 113-114, 149
Byrne, B.M., 49

C
calendars, monthly, 134
Cartledge, G., 3, 148
Charles, C., 2, 148
Christoff, K., 4, 149
Clark, H.B., 4, 148
class newsletters, 134
classroom control, 17-18
classroom management, 1-8, 77-78
  five major factors of effective, 2 Cobb, J.A., 3, 150
Combs, M.L., 50, 148
comments, school staff, 137
communicate with significant others, right to, 13
compliance, partial, 124-126
compliments
  accepting, 53
  giving, 53, 146
concern-for-others rationale, 65
conditioned reinforcer, 39-40
conferences, parent-teacher, 133-134
consequences, 34-35, 65-68, 92-93, 108-110, 115
applied, 35
  appropriate, 92-93
  logical, 66
  long-term, 67-68
  major, 109-110
  moderate, 108-109
  natural, 35, 66
  negative, 65, 92
  positive, 75, 82, 92-93
contingencies, reinforcement, 38
contingent reinforcement, 115
continuous schedule, 39
contract
  evaluation, 116
  monitoring, 116
contracts
  behavior, 113-120
  sample, 118-120
Convention on Rights of the Child, 15
Cooper, J.O., 34-36, 39, 45, 148
Cormony, R., 18, 148

corporal punishment, 13-14
corrective teaching, 56, 98
Coughlin, D.D., 3, 148
Council for Exceptional Children Conference, 131-132
coupling statements, 99-100, 124
crisis, in, 124
criteria, performance, 114-116
criticism
  accepting, 52, 98, 145
  giving, 53
Cunningham, P.J., 3, 147
curriculum
  nights, 135
  social skills, 4, 5-6, 50-56
Czerwionka, J., 3, 148

D
D'Zurilla, T.J., 25, 149
Dahir, J., 3, 148
Daly, D.L., 3, 148
Daly, P.B., 3, 148
debriefing phase, 11
Department of Education, U.S., 131, 152
deprivation, reinforcement, 38
description of
  appropriate behavior, 74, 89-90
  inappropriate behavior, 89
differential reinforcement, 40-42
difficulty, 92
DiRisi, W.J., 113-114, 149
disadvantages, 28-29
disagreeing, 52, 145
discrimination, 46-47
Dowd, T., 54-55, 84, 88, 98, 149
Downs, J.C., 6, 7, 64, 149
Doyle, W., 2, 149
Drabman, R., 7, 151
Duke, D., 2, 149

E
Educate America Act, 131
Education for All Handicapped Children Act, 14-15
education model, Boys Town, 1-8
Education, U.S. Department of, 131, 152
effective praise, 71-76
  benefits of, 72
  definition of, 71
  steps of, 73-75
  when to use, 73
8th Amendment, 13
Eitzen, D.S., 64, 149
Elder, G.H., Jr., 66, 149
Emmer, E., 78, 147
empathy, 88-89, 101, 124
Engelmann, S., 21, 77, 147
escape/escape, 44
evaluation, ongoing program, 10
Evertson, C., 78, 147
Exceptional Children Conference, Council for, 131-132
extinction, 46

F
facial expressions, 57, 97
fading, 43
fair pair rule, 46
Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act, 13
Family Home Program, Boys Town, 3
feedback, 82, 91-92
file material, right to access, 13
1st Amendment, 14
Fixsen, D.L., 3, 5, 6, 65-66, 72, 151, 152
Flanagan, Father Edward J., 2
follow-up practice, 82-83
following instructions, 52, 54, 145
4:1 ratio (positive vs. corrective interactions), 76, 133
14th Amendment, 15
4th Amendment, 12

freedom of expression, right to, 14
freedom of movement, right to, 12

G
general praise, 94
generalization, 46
generalized reinforcer, 40
Gershaw, N.J., 6, 149
Glickman, C., 2, 153
Goldgried, M.R., 25, 149
Goldstein, A.P., 6, 24, 149
Goss vs. Lopez, 15
Grandma's Law, 39
Greenspan, S., 49, 149
greeting others, 52, 145
Gresham, F.M., 4, 6, 49, 149
Grosenick, J.K., 7, 149
Gunter, P.L., 17, 152

H
handicapped children, 14-15
Hansen, D., 4, 149
Haring, N.G., 46, 152
Harris, M., 19, 150
Hawryluk, M.K., 132, 152
Hazel, J.S., 7, 151
Hazelwood vs. Kuhlmeier, 14
Heron, T.E., 34-36, 39, 45, 148
Heward, W.L., 34-36, 39, 45, 148
hidden curriculum, 50
homework, 12
Honig vs. Doe, 14
Hope, H., 3, 150
hostile parents, 142
Huntze, S.L., 7, 149

I
IEPs. See Individual Education Plans.,
in crisis, 124
in loco parentis, 12
inappropriate behavior, description of, 89
Individual Education Plans, 13, 14
infraction, major, 121-122
initial praise, 88-89
instructions, following, 52, 54, 145
intensive teaching, 126-128
interact with others, right to, 13
interactions, teaching, 6, 59-60, 87-95, 128
intermittent
    reinforcement, 73
    schedule, 39
interpersonal conflicts, 25
intervention, administrative, 7-8, 106-110, 121-130
interviews, student, 10
intrapersonal problems, 25
introducing yourself, 54, 146
isolation, physical, 13

J
Jack, S.L., 17, 150
Jensen, W.R., 114-115, 151
Jones, L.S., 2, 17-19, 21, 64, 77, 150
Jones, M., 2, 150
Jones, V.F., 2, 17-19, 21, 64, 77, 150

K
Kaplan, J.S., 26-28, 150
Kelley, M.L., 115, 133-134, 150
Kendall, P., 24, 150
Kirigin, K.A., 65-66, 72, 152
Klein, P., 6, 149
Knitzer, J., 17, 49, 152
Kounin, J., 78, 150
Kutsick, K., 6, 64, 149
Kuykendall, K., 132, 150

L
Larson, K., 3, 150
logical consequences, 66
long-term rationales, 67-68

M
Mager, R.F., 50, 150
Maloney, D.M., 3, 148
Meadows, N., 50, 150
meaningless work, right not to be given, 12
Meckel, A., 2, 149
Milburn, J.F., 3, 148
Miller, C.S., 72, 150
minor misbehavior over time, 122-123
misbehavior
  minor, 122-123
  serious, 121-122
modeling, 24
monitoring, physical, 125-126
Montague, M., 4, 150
monthly calendars, 134
Morse, W., 18, 150
Mortimore, P., 18, 150
motivation systems, 6-7
movement, right to freedom of, 12

N
National Crisis Prevention Institute, 125
natural
  consequences, 35, 66
  elements, right to, 14
needs, student's, 103
Neel, R.S., 50, 150
negative
  consequences rationale, 65
  modeling, 45
  reinforcement, 37, 43-44
neglectful parents, 143
New Jersey vs. TLO, 12
newsletters, class, 134
Nichols, P., 17, 150
no, accepting for an answer, 52, 145
Norman, J., 19, 150
Northrop, J., 148
Northwest Regional Education Laboratory, 77, 151
notes to parents, 134-138
  samples, 136-138
nourishment, right to, 13
Novak, J., 18, 151

O
O'Leary, K.D., 7, 151
objective descriptions, 59
office
  referral form, 127
  referring students to the, 106-110, 121-123
Offord, D., 3, 150
Olson, M., 135, 142, 151
ongoing behavior, 97-112, 122
  definition of, 97
  preventing, 98-99
options, generating a list of, 27-28
out-of-control behavior, 97-112
outdoor activities, 14

P
Palanki, A., 132, 148
Palma, L.P., 3, 147
parent
  consumer questionnaire, 135, 140-141
  interview, 140-141
  involvement program survey, 139
  involvement, roadblocks to, 142-143
parent-teacher conferences, 133-134
parental surveys, 135, 139
Parenthood Education, Betty Phillips Center for, 132-133, 147
parents
  abusive, 143
  hostile, 142
  neglectful, 143
  uncooperative, 142
  unreliable, 142
  working with, 131-143
Parker, G., 50, 150
partial compliance, 124-126
peer pressure, resisting, 53

penalty clause, 115
performance criteria, 114-115
Peter, V.J., 151
Phillips Center for Parenthood Education,
Betty, 132-133, 147
Phillips, E.A., 3, 6, 151
Phillips, E.L., 3, 5, 6, 65-66, 72, 147, 148, 151, 152
physical
  isolation, 13
  monitoring, 125-126
  restraint, 13-14
Pierson, E., 132, 152
Pikas, A., 65, 151
planned teaching, 80-83
policies, written, 10
Porter, A., 68, 151
positive
  consequences, 75, 82, 101
  correction statements, 101
  interaction styles, training in, 10
  punishment, 44-45
  reinforcement, 36-40
possessions, right to one's own, 12
practice, 82-83, 90-91
praise, 71-76, 83-89, 94, 98, 100, 124
  effective, 71-76
  general, 94
  initial, 88-89
  specific, 100
Premack Principle, 39
preteaching, 83
preventive
  prompt, 83-84
  teaching, 77-85, 98
  teaching, benefits of, 79
  teaching, when to use, 79-80
primary reinforcer, 39
privacy, right to, 12
problem-solving, 23-31
  definition of, 25
program evaluation, ongoing, 10
prompt, preventive, 83-84
punishment, 7, 13-14, 37
  corporal, 13-14
  positive, 44-45
Purkey, W., 18, 151

Q
quality components, 73-74

R
Ramp, K.K., 66, 148
rationales, 63-69, 74, 90, 100-101, 124-125
  benefits, 64-66
  components of, 66-68
  concern-for-others, 65
  definition of, 63
  importance of, 64
  long-term, 67-68
  negative consequences, 65
  short-term, 67
  types of, 64-65
  when to use, 68-69
reality statements, 100-101
Reavis, H.K., 114-115, 151
records, school, 13
redirection, 94
referral
  automatic, 121-122
  form, office, 127
  process, 106-110, 121-123
referring teacher, 126
reinforcement
  contingencies, 38, 115
  deprivation, 38
  differential, 40-42
  intermittent, 73
  negative, 37, 43-44
  positive, 36-40
  reserves, 76, 98
  satiation, 38

  schedules, 39
reinforcer
  activity oriented, 40
  amount of, 38
  appropriateness of, 38
  back-up, 40
  conditioned, 39-40
  generalized, 40
  immediacy of, 38
  primary, 39
  secondary, 39-40
  social, 40
  tangible, 40
relationships
  building and maintaining, 17-22
  how they develop, 20
remember when times, 21
report cards, 134
reporting other youths' behavior, 54, 146
request
  acknowledgment, 74, 90
  making a, 52
resisting peer pressure, 53
respect of body and person, right to, 13-14
response cost, 37, 45-46, 92-93
restraint, physical, 13-14
Rhode, G., 114-115, 151
right not to be given meaningless work, 12
right to
  access file material, 13
  communicate with significant others, 13
  freedom of expression, 14
  freedom of movement, 12
  interact with others, 13
  natural elements, 14
  nourishment, 13
  one's own possessions, 12
  privacy, 12
  respect of body and person, 13-14
  treatment, 13
rights, student, 9-15
Roebuck, R., 19, 147
role-playing, 29-30
Roosa, J.B., 25, 151
Rosenshine, B., 19, 151
rule, school, 121-122

S

safe environments, promoting, 9-10
safety issues, 125-126
Sammons, P., 18, 150
Sarason, I.G., 5, 151
satiation, reinforcement, 38
Schacht, R., 135, 152
schedules of reinforcement, 39
Schneider, B.H., 49
school notes, 134-138
  samples, 136-138
school records, 13
school rule, 121-122
Schumaker, J.B., 7, 151
Schure, M.B., 24-28, 152
secondary reinforcer, 39-40
self-control, helping students regain, 99-101
Serow, R.C., 72, 151
Shah, S.A., 5, 151, 152
shaping
  advantages of, 41
  behavioral, 40-43
  disadvantages of, 41
Sheldon, J., 7, 151
Sherman, J.S., 7, 151
Shores, R.E., 17, 152
simulation, 29-30
situation, define the, 26
6th Amendment, 13
Slaby, D.A., 50, 148
Smallwood, D.L., 132, 152
social learning theory, 5, 33-47
social reinforcer, 40
social skills
  advanced, 51, 53-54
  basic, 51-52

  curriculum, 4, 5-6, 50-56
  definition of, 50
  for special education/young students, 145-146
  teaching, 49-56
socialization, 4
SODAS method, 25-31
Soloman, D., 72, 151
solutions, 29-30
Sontag, J.C., 135, 152
sorry, saying you're, 146
special education students, social skills for, 145-146
special-needs students, 4
Spivack, G., 24-28, 152
Sprafkin, R.P., 6, 149
St. Lawrence, J., 4, 149
staff practice inquiries, 10-11
Steinberg, Z., 17, 49, 152
Stephens, T.M., 3, 6, 49, 133, 152
Stephens, T.M., 3, 152
student
  interviews, 10
  rights, 9-15
success criteria, 116
successive approximations, 40-41

T
talking with others, 53, 146
tangible reinforcer, 40
teacher's attention, getting the, 52, 145
teacher-student relationships, 17-20
teaching interactions, 6, 59-60, 87-95, 128
  completing, 102-103
  components of, 87-94
  when to use, 87
teaching
  intensive, 126-128
  planned, 80-83
  preventive, 77-85
telephone calls, 132-133
Thomas, D., 3, 21, 77, 147, 148
three-term contingency pattern, 33-36
Tierney, J., 54-55, 84, 88, 98, 149
time-out, 12
Timo, K., 50, 150
Tinker vs. Des Moines, 14
token economy, 7
TransParent School Model, 133
treatment, right to, 13
Troutmann, A.C., 40, 147
tuning out, 45

U
U.S. Department of Education, 131, 152
uncooperative parents, 142
unreliable parents, 142
up-front teaching, 79

V
Venziano, C., 4, 152
Venziano, L., 4, 152
verbal behaviors, 97
verbs as describers, 58
voice mail, 133
volunteering, 53

W
Wells, P.L., 7, 149
White, O.R., 46, 152
Willner, A.G., 65-66, 72, 148, 152
Wolf, J.S., 133, 152
Wolf, M.M., 3, 5, 6, 65-66, 72, 148, 151, 152
Wolfgang, C., 2, 153
Wood, R., 148

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